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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy & Science Fiction

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APRIL 1952

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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

VOLUME 3, No. 2 APRIL, 1952

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During the first year of our publication contributors furnished our Bureau of Imaginary Zoölogy with a very satisfactory accumulation of data on the curious fauna of other planets and dimensions. But last year, our contributors have been abominably negligent; not since Kris Neville detailed the deplorable activities of the quiggie *(F&SF Dec. 1950) has anyone come back with a report on* any *type of animal. Not that the Bureau's directors haven't begged repeatedly for further information for their files! We did not ask Mr. Alan E. Nourse; he just went out and brought back this account of the wholly detestable* Vimp. *The* Vimp *is probably the nastiest little animal you've ever read about; so unpleasant is he that it's just impossible to establish any kind of communication with him. Thus,* Vimp *isn't his true name, nor have we ever discovered his point of origin. But, thanks to Mr. Nourse, we do know how to get rid of him. Which is precious knowledge indeed!*

Love Thy Vimp

by ALAN E. NOURSE

THE red "urgent" signal was blinking wildly on the library visiphone when Barney Holder walked into the house that evening. He glanced at it tiredly, then flipped his hat onto the shelf and called out, "I'm home, dear."

His wife looked up from her magazine with an owly stare. "So I see," she said indifferently, running a hand through her pretty blonde hair. "Only *two* hours late tonight. You're getting better all the time." She turned her cold gray eyes back to the magazine. "If you expect to eat tonight," she added, "you'll have to see what you can find. Your little friends got into the dinner."

"Oh, Flora!" Barney hesitated in the doorway, glancing uneasily at the blinking call-signal. "Really, dear, you might have waited until I got home — and covered the food so they couldn't get in."

"Sure, I suppose I should lock the dinner in a strongbox," Flora snapped angrily. "You're supposed to be getting rid of the nasty things, not feeding them." She tossed her head and glared at him as he started for the visiphone. "And it's about time you answered that thing, too! It's been blinking for half an hour."

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Barney flipped the switch with trembling fingers, watched the screen blink and waver until Hugo Martin's broad face was clearly outlined. Barney's boss was normally large and florid of face; now his cheeks were almost purple, his eyes wide with excitement. "Barney!" he cried, his voice trembling. "*We've got one!*"

Barney sat down abruptly, excitement rising in his chest. "You're kidding," he said quickly. "You don't mean we've —"

Martin nodded, almost incoherent. "We've got one! Right out in our own laboratory! It's sitting there snarling at me right now. You know that trap you built?"

"Oh, nonsense," snapped Barney irritably. "Come off it, Hugo. Nobody's ever caught a Vimp. I've built fifty traps if I've built one, and not one of them ever worked —" He stopped and looked at the florid face on the screen, his eyes bright. "Do you really mean it?"

"Of course I mean it! That last trap caught one, somehow, and it's right in the lab. Now maybe we can get somewhere getting rid of these nasty little —" He broke off, glancing anxiously over his shoulder. His voice lowered cautiously. "Now, look, Barney. Get down here right away, and don't — for God's sake don't — say anything to the papers. We'd be mobbed. Just get down here, and maybe we can squeeze something out of this one."

Barney flipped the switch, his heart thumping wildly, and struggled back into his topcoat. He almost collided with his wife as he started for the door.

"What's all the excitement?" she asked, her pretty face clouding. "And where do you think you're going in such a rush?"

Barney groped on the shelf for his hat. "We've caught a Vimp," he said. "I'm going back to the lab to look it over."

"Very funny," said Flora humorlessly, her gray eyes wide with suspicion. "Now tell me another. Vimp, my eye. You'd be the last man in the world to catch a Vimp. Who is she this time, Barney? Anybody I know? Got to keep my files up to date, you know."

"Oh, now, Flora," Barney groaned. "Let's not start that again. You're being perfectly ridiculous."

"Ridiculous! With my husband philandering with every hussy that happens along —"

"They don't just happen along," Barney interposed unhappily. "I mean, I'm not philandering. I was merely discussing business —" He stopped and shrugged. "What's the use? This is the real thing, and no joke. Martin has a Vimp, down at the lab, and I'm going to look at it. And if you don't like it —" He adjusted his hat and stepped resolutely out the door.

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His car was parked in the driveway. He had almost reached it when he noticed the steering wheel sitting loose on the lawn, and saw the brown fuzzy bottom sticking out from under the hood. "Hey!" he screamed in a burst of rage, running to the car and shaking his fist in despair. "Get out of there! Scram! Beat it!"

The bottom disappeared abruptly, and a wrinkled brown face appeared from the hood, blinking balefully. Barney ducked as a spark plug whistled past his ear. Helpless rage rose in his throat as the little brown creature darted across the lawn and stopped near the hedge, hopping up and down, beating its hands together in malignant glee. Barney peered under the hood with a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach. The distributor was gone, the spark plugs all broken off, the generator twisted, and three bolts completely unscrewed from the engine block.

Barney swore and shook his fist at the little brown fuzz-ball disappearing under the hedge. Slamming down the hood angrily, he strode down to the corner and hailed a passing cab. This, he reflected sourly, had all the makings of a very bad night.

The Vimps had first appeared, quite suddenly, one hot August afternoon about a year before, an appearance quite as remarkable as the creatures themselves. A certain farmer's small daughter had come into the house bawling that afternoon, a large red welt on her arm, babbling some sort of gibberish about "little monkeys coming out of the ground." Fabrication or not, her arm was visibly sore, so the farmer investigated. He found them, down in the south pasture, coming one by one from a strange, round, shimmering hole in the ground: small, fuzzy, gibbon-like, quick, popping rapidly up and out, and darting over to stand with the group already through, hissing and snarling at the farmer and each other. About two dozen of them emerged, and then the shiny ring vanished quite suddenly, and the little brown creatures started away, moving in sudden spurts of remarkable speed, fanning out to disappear into the woods. The farmer reported the occurrence to the local newspaper, and got himself laughed at — after all, little monkeys *don't* just pop out of the ground — and, indeed, for almost a week nothing more was seen or heard of them. The farmer scratched his stubbled chin in puzzlement, thrashed his daughter soundly for telling such tales, and went back to plowing.

It took just about a week. First the neighboring town saw them, three of them, trotting in an odd, three-legged gait down the middle of Main Street, snarling and snapping at everyone in sight. Then reports began coming in from towns farther and farther away. The elderly maiden schoolteacher who saw a little fuzzy animal drawing improper pictures

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on the sidewalk with chalk as she passed by, the businessman who came out one morning to find his spanking new 1955 automobile completely dismantled on the lawn, the minister who tried to shoo one of the little brown fuzz-balls off the rectory porch, and said many unministerial things when he got himself bitten for his pains. The original two dozen grew to four, and then to eight, as the little creatures multiplied impossibly and spread. They got their name when an enterprising reporter quite accurately dubbed them Very Important Menacing Problems and the wire services and broadcasters used the expected abbreviation, VIMPs. They reached the neighboring city in ever-growing numbers, biting people, ripping their clothes, screaming gibberish at them, raiding refrigerators, chewing putty out of windowpanes, breaking open mailboxes and switching letters, jamming motors, switching street-car tracks, hissing and snarling and spitting and glowering, jumping into people's hair and biting their ankles. Complaints rose in a wave, demands that someone, somehow, figure out how to get rid of these Vimps. After all, people said, rats could be exterminated, and mosquitoes, and Vimps were far more annoying than either.

But the Vimps presented a slightly more difficult problem. In the first place, nobody could catch them. They moved with incredible speed, so fast that they couldn't even be shot. And they were clever, so astonishingly clever! Traps were built, impossibly complicated traps, and the Vimps stole the bait from them and hissed in derision when the people tried to figure out how the bait could be gotten *out* without a Vimp getting *in*. Complaints continued to billow throughout the ensuing months as the Vimps waxed and grew strong, tormenting people, pestering, annoying, biting, scratching. Within months there wasn't a community in the land, large or small, that hadn't seen one of the nasty little creatures, and still not one of them had been caught. Ships were plagued with them at sea, and angry reports began reaching the Capitol from India, Europe, Asia. Finally the towns and cities appealed to their States for aid, and the States begged the National Legislature to do something, *anything*, to get rid of this fuzzy brown plague that had invaded the land. People grew angry, and the angrier they grew, the more Vimps seemed to turn up to make them still angrier.

And then the Committee was set up — a slightly confused Committee, to be sure, since nobody really knew what sort of approach to use on the Vimps. Sociologists argued that they were intelligent creatures, worthy of careful sociological study; physicists insisted that however they had arrived, by time-screen or matter transmitter, they had knowledge that could be of vast importance to the world of science; the physicians placidly agreed that if Vimps came from another world, and obviously they must have, they

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would soon die off from native diseases. And the average man in the street grated his teeth, slapped a furry, snarling fuzz-ball off his neck, and troubled deaf Heaven with his seething prayer that *somebody* do *something* — at least catch one, or do *something* —

And the National Committee for Vimp Control finally managed to bring together such a curious admixture of viewpoints as Barney Holder, mild student and teacher of sociology, and Hugo Martin, stormy U. S. Navy consultant on rat extermination, and the Committee dropped the problem squarely, wholeheartedly, and none too comfortably into their laps.

The Vimp sat in the middle of the cage, glowering at them from button-black eyes, its round ears sticking straight out from its fuzzy round head, its little monkey-face wrinkled. Two large incisors in the front of its mouth were flanked on either side by a double row of needle-sharp teeth, and it balanced itself nervously on its three scrawny legs. It looked for all the world like an angry little two-foot gnome, sitting back on its haunches, hating people.

"It doesn't look pleased," remarked Barney, turning his chair so he could see it more clearly.

Hugo Martin wiped his beefy face with a large handkerchief and chuckled unpleasantly. "You should have been here when it found it couldn't get loose," he growled. "I don't know if it has a language or not, but if it has it was using every dirty word it knows. Mad? You never saw anything so mad!" He licked his heavy lips with relish. "I'm thinking it's high time one of *them* got mad."

Barney grinned and watched the Vimp. "I still don't get it," he said finally. "These little beasties have licked every trap we've been able to cook up, yet this one was fairly obvious — a wide-open mirror maze with a weight-sensitive trapdoor." He looked up at the heavy man across the room from him. "How did it work?"

Martin scowled at the Vimp. "Got taken up with its own meanness, I'd say. It got in the building this noon, and spent the afternoon tormenting the laboratory cat. Made the cat so mad she could hardly see straight, and finally she ran into the maze to get away from it. Then she got caught, which made her madder yet, and the next thing I knew the Vimp was right in the trap with her, pulling her tail and yowling to beat Ned. The Vimp didn't seem to notice that it was trapped until we let Puss out the bait-hole! And then —" he grinned maliciously — "blooey! We had one mad little animal!"

Barney walked over to the cage, peered mildly in at the little brown gnome. The Vimp met him eye for eye, glowering out malignantly. "Nice

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little Vimp," murmured Barney thoughtfully. The Vimp hunched its back and spat, never blinking its button-black eyes.

Barney extended his hand, his voice soft and soothing. "Come on, little fellow. Why not be friends? After all, now that you're here we might as well have a talk — OUCH!" He withdrew his hand sharply, saw the little semicircle of blood from the pinpoint teeth. The Vimp hopped up and down on one skinny leg, hissing and screeching in obvious delight. Barney felt his face flush angrily. "Now, now," he said unsteadily. "That wasn't nice —" The Vimp sat back, scratched its white tummy, and glared.

Hugo Martin chuckled nastily. "You aren't going to get anywhere with that approach," he said. "I got bit three times. Treat it mean, I say. Damn' nasty little tyrant —"

"No, no." Barney shook his head and ran a hand through his dark hair. "These little fellows are intelligent. They aren't stupid — why, up until now they've outsmarted every attempt to catch them. They *must* be able to think — and on a high order, too. And if they're intelligent, we've got to get through to them, somehow." He drew a pipe from his vest pocket and began stuffing the bowl. "If they *are* extraterrestrial life, they must have a remarkable knowledge of science to have gotten here at all. Maybe if we offered it some food —"

Martin wiped his forehead and snorted. "You may try, if you like," he growled. "I don't want to get close to it."

Barney took a small chunk of bread from the desk and advanced it to the cage, watching the fuzzy captive closely. The Vimp looked at the bread skeptically, his leg muscles tightening. Then with an incredibly swift motion he snatched the bread from Barney's fingers, leaving another welt on the back of his hand.

"Why, you dirty —" Barney slapped at the Vimp through the bars in quick rage. The Vimp crowded up close to the bars like a small, vicious gibbon, black eyes gleaming malignantly, hissing, making nasty little sounds in its throat. Barney felt his face grow red as the creature hopped up and down on one foot, devouring the bread and making little noises of malicious delight.

Barney's hand shook, and he gripped the chair arm tight as he sat down. "Very soon," he muttered, nursing his bitten hand, "I shall lose my temper." He looked up at Martin helplessly. "How could anything be so mean? What do you have to do to get a pleasant reaction from it?"

"Nothing will get a pleasant reaction from it," Martin retorted angrily. "These things haven't got any niceness in them."

"But there must be *some* way of reaching them, somehow —" Barney rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Look here," he said suddenly. "We've been

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getting all sorts of letters from people. The Vimps pester me, and they pester you — but some people just *aren't bothered* by them."

Hugo Martin blinked incredulously. "I thought *everybody* was bothered by them."

Barney eyed the Vimp thoughtfully for a moment, then dug into his desk. "Not everyone," he said. "Here's a letter that came in from Translations Bureau yesterday." He drew out a large roll of parchment with a slip of office paper stapled to it.

"Translations Bureau?"

"Yes. It was from some place in India. Let's see, now, it says:

> *"To our brethren of the West. We would remind you that all matter is as nothing, only the spirit prevails. All bodies are of matter, bodies from this and all other worlds that are in God. He who has learned to ignore matter has put his first steps on the path of understanding. These you call Vimps, they too are but matter and as such can, in the proper time, be ignored and so rendered harmless."*

Barney stopped.

"Yes, yes!" exclaimed Hugo Martin, his pudgy face flushed excitedly. "How do they say to get rid of them?"

Barney let the letter drop to the floor. "They don't," he growled. "That's all they say. . . . But hang it, there were other letters! Like the one from the Franciscan monk, who said prayer and fasting would keep them away. And that newlywed couple who told us the Vimps wouldn't go near the church when they were married, but invaded their cottage by the dozens four days later —"

"Church! Religion!" yelped Martin, bouncing out of his chair. "That ties it all in! Maybe they're afraid of it, or maybe they can't stand being prayed against — maybe all we'd have to do to drive them away is to get Religion!" Martin walked about excitedly. "Maybe the sign of the Cross would keep the nasty things away!"

Barney blinked. "Maybe there *is* a religious angle, at that," he said. He stared hard at the Vimp which was pouting angrily in a corner of the cage. "Let's go down and get some coffee and think this over."

They sat in the small coffee shop, Hugo Martin muttering to himself occasionally, Barney just sipping his coffee and thinking. Across the street a crowd had gathered in a little park, and a speaker had risen on a crude platform. Suddenly a loudspeaker blared in Barney's ear, jolting his mind away from Vimps.

"— it's the curse of the Devil coming to punish us sinful men," the voice was bellowing to the crowd, "and we've got to fight it, that's what we've

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got to do! We got to fight the Devil on his own ground! We got to get down on our knees and pray!"

The crowd inched closer, drinking in the fiery words. "He's brought the plague upon us for our sins!" the evangelist cried angrily. "We got to stand up and fight the Devil, we can't give in, 'cause when we give in the fires o' Hell will burn us, the sulfur and brimstone o' Hell will get at our very innards!" The rich hoarse voice roared across the street. "If we want to free ourselves, we got to get down on our knees and *pray!*" He scowled fiercely and shook his fist. "We got to cleanse ourselves 'fore the Lord Almighty will spare us —"

Barney Holder was across the room in a minute, staring out the window at the gesticulating preacher. "*Look at that!*" he hissed to Martin.

"Yeah, that's just Preacher Simes. He gets up there and harangues every night, 'til he gets too violent —"

"But look at the platform!"

The preacher was shouting louder, his face red with angry indignation. And up on the rostrum, staring at him with beady eyes, drinking in his every word, snarling at him, were five large Vimps.

"It's the curse of the Almighty visited on us —" The preacher paused to slap away a Vimp that had run up and bit him in the ear. "Get out of there, you damned little — I say, we got to pray —"

Suddenly the platform was alive with them, tearing at the preacher's trousers, unlacing his shoes, scrapping and scratching, hissing and yowling until the preacher, with a howl of anguished rage, jumped from the platform like a crazy man and dashed, slapping and kicking, for the street.

Barney sank wearily into his chair, crestfallen. "Well," he said, deflatedly. "There goes the religion angle."

The captive Vimp started screeching and caterwauling as soon as they came back to the lab, gnawing viciously at the bars, glaring at them with beady black eyes. "What are we going to do?" moaned Barney. "There must be some way to make them be nice."

"There's nothing we can do, I tell you." Hugo Martin scowled at the animal in the cage. "What we've got to do is find some way to kill them, that's all. We can't shoot them — they just dodge the bullets. They won't go near poison. And gas doesn't seem to bother them a bit." The big man kicked angrily at the cage. "I tell you, Barney, there's no use trying to contact them. They don't want to be friends, they're nasty clear through. And I've taken about all the plaguing from these little pests that I can stand. So has everyone else. They're driving people to their wits' end, and it's our job to find how to get rid of them." His voice lowered bitterly as

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he stared at Barney, his fat red face flushed. "Three cars I've had to buy — three brand-new cars — because these things tear them apart. I'm being starved out of house and home because I can't buy food fast enough. I've got a whole tribe of them, living in my house, biting my children, laughing at me, scaring my wife, ripping out my plumbing — I can't take much more, I tell you — and all you can think of is contacting them! Bah! Find out how to kill them, I say!"

The Vimp had shifted its attention to Martin, crowding close to the bars, watching the big man avidly, almost hungrily, as his voice rose to fever pitch. Barney watched the Vimp, and felt a chill run up his spine. "Hugo," he said softly. "That little fellow is sensitive to you. Look at him! I'd swear he's drinking in every word you're saying."

"Well, I hope they choke him," Martin roared, "because he's not coming out of the cage alive!" He turned on the Vimp, glaring helplessly. "Pest! Why don't you go back where you came from?"

The visiphone began blinking suddenly. Martin threw the Vimp a final bitter look and lifted the receiver. "Lab," he said. Then he grimaced and crooked a finger at Barney without cutting in the screen. "Just a minute, Flora —"

Barney took the receiver, noting the knowing look on Martin's face with a flush of shame. "Yes, Flora," he said mildly. There was a long pause as the receiver squealed angrily. Finally: "Flora, I *told* you I was going to the lab. I may be here all night — Flora, can't you give me credit for a little — I see — oh, you have, have you? Well, what am I supposed to do about it? Chase it out! I'm playing patty-cake with one down here — oh, hell!" Barney slammed the switch down, cutting off the angry chirping. "Something is going to have to be done," he muttered, as he stalked across the room, a harried look in his eyes. "Those Vimps have got Flora so worked up she won't give me a minute's rest!"

Martin glanced up at him shrewdly. "Rumor has it that you and Flora were at it long before the Vimps came."

Barney shot him a black look, and shuffled back to the cage. "I can't even get along with my wife," he said miserably. "How can I make friends with one of these nasty little things?" He glared at the Vimp and the Vimp glared back. "Maybe we *should* just get rid of them." He turned to the fuzzy little animal furiously. "We could kill you, you know. We could starve you to death, or we could bring in a machine gun — a *fast* machine gun — and riddle you. We're just trying to be nice, but we can wipe you out clean if you don't cooperate."

The Vimp sat straight up, just as though it had understood, and spat on the floor with magnificent disdain. Then it turned around and walked

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to a corner and sat down on its three legs, blinking owlishly. Barney sat watching it for a long time.

He was home early for supper the next evening. Flora met him at the door, a bedraggled combination of tears, anger, and fright. "Those *nasty* little things got in the house again," she wailed. "I couldn't help letting them in, and one of them bit me—" She turned on Barney bitterly, a five-foot bundle of frustrated fury. "What kind of man are you, Barney Holder? You were supposed to be so smart, such a clever man, and you can't even find a way to keep them out of your own house. You don't care what happens to me when you're gone. I thought I married a pretty smart fellow, and he turns out to be a second-rate teacher that can't even outwit a—a *Vimp!*" She burst into tears and sank down on the sofa, nursing her bitten ankle.

"That's not fair," snapped Barney, "and you know it! I'm doing the best I can—"

"Well, your best just isn't good enough, you half-wit! *Look! They're right here in the living room watching us!*"

They were, all right. Two fuzzy brown animals were sitting there, their upper lips curled, snarling at each other with bared teeth, watching Barney and Flora out of the corner of their little eyes. They slapped one another and pulled each other's fur, biting and spitting at each other. The larger one threw a haymaker that spun the smaller head over heels across the room with a venomous snarl, but it picked itself up and came back, screeching all the louder, to clout the larger one in the face with a small doubled fist. The battle raged, but there was something peculiar about their fighting, Barney thought. A very curious fight. They snarled, and bit, and pounded, and screeched, but somehow—

"Flora!" Sudden light burst in Barney's brain, an idea, incredible, ridiculous. He looked wonderingly at his wife, and then back at the snarling fuzz-balls. "Flora! They aren't fighting! They're making love!"

Flora blinked through tearful eyes, looking at the Vimps in alarm. The small one raked its claws across the other's face. "Garbage!" said Flora succinctly.

"No, no—look at them!" Barney's eyes were suddenly very bright, and in an instant he was across the room, standing over his wife. "Stand up," he commanded.

Flora blinked twice. "I will not—"

Barney swiftly reached down, grabbed her wrist and jerked her to her feet. Before she could move he took her fiercely in his arms and planted his lips hard on hers. She squeaked through the kiss, twisting to push him

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away. "Barney, stop it! You can't manhandle *me*, you great big ape —"

"Shut up!"

Some urgency in his voice stopped her, almost frightened her. "You will sit down," Barney whispered excitedly. "Then you will kiss me, right here on the couch. And you will kindly shut up while you're doing it!"

She sat down, bewildered, and Barney sat down beside her, tightened his arms about her again.

"Barney —"

The room was silent for a long moment.

Then a longer moment.

"Barney." Her voice was softer now, her face softer, sweeter than Barney had seen it in a long time. He kissed her again, the Vimps forgotten. "Barney — it's been a long time since we've necked on the davenport."

"Ummmmmmmm —"

"An *awful* long time."

"Too long, Flora."

"We should — maybe try it more often —"

A sound, an odd sound. Almost as if by signal they looked up. They saw the Vimps, angry eyes staring at them — the two Vimps that had forgotten their fighting, and were backing away from them, backs hunched, hissing, spitting, *trembling*.

Quite suddenly the Vimps turned and bolted for the door.

"You," said Hugo Martin unhappily, "have gone off your trolley. You don't know what you're saying. You're crazy. And if you think I'm going to swallow that sort of — of nonsense —" he swallowed, his double chin bobbing — "you're double-crazy." He lumbered back to his desk, his red face glowing.

Barney smiled easily. He was clean-shaven, his eyes bright. "I'm not wrong, Hugo. I've got the answer. It may sound ridiculous, but the whole business is ridiculous. And it'll work, I'll stake my salary on it!"

He sat down in the chair opposite the Vimp cage, easing his sore arm. "Look at it this way," he said. "Wherever colonists or invaders have gone, into new places, new countries, what have they done? Have they adapted themselves to their new environment? Have they tried to 'go native,' to actually *be* like the people they found? Have they tried to fall into native economic patterns, culture patterns? They have not. China, Africa, the Americas, India — wherever they've gone, it's been the same old story. They've tried to change the environment to suit themselves. They've tried to make it like the one back home. The temperature, the habits, the *culture*. The last thing men would dream of would be to alter their culture patterns

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to match an alien environment. And if they found things, where they were, to be unchangeable, hostile, inalterably foreign, they've always, always turned around and come home."

"But the Vimps!" snapped Martin impatiently. "I don't see what this has to do with —"

"Everything," said Barney flatly. "The Vimps are from another planet. They're intelligent, all right, and they have a culture, too — a rather nasty culture, it seems. With men, the *basic* culture is founded on peace and familial love — the ancient sign of the raised right hand, saying, 'I have no weapons.' Basically, man seeks to live in peace undisturbed, and takes that peace with him to alien lands, and where those lands are too hostile, he has ultimately come home beaten.

"Still, another world, a Vimp world, might have a culture on a different basis. A basis impossible for men to tolerate. Not based on peace at all, you see. Based on hate. Pure, rich, ripe, unadulterated hate."

Martin's eyes widened. "You mean —"

"I mean they hate each other and everything else. Hate is their life-force, the foundation of their moral values. They live, eat, sleep, and die with hate in their every thought. The idea of kindness and love is foreign to them, unbelievable, frightening, alien. They came here without the barest inkling of the abstract concept of love, and they expected to find hate here, too. And what they found was fearful to them, hateful, hostile — a culture based on love and peace. But they saw, or somehow felt, that men were capable, under certain circumstances, of hatefulness, and that was all the Vimps needed. They just had to change things a little, was all. All they wanted was to be hated!"

"Well, they're getting what they want!" snarled Hugo Martin. "I hate them, I hope to tell you. Lord! How I hate them. I hate them so much —"

"And you seem to draw them, don't you? You have them all over your house, you hate them so much. They don't want anything to do with mystics, or monks — they torment cats and dogs within an inch of their lives, but they'd never, never bother a cow! They come to you because you provide just the hate-filled environment they *must have*. Don't you see the implications, man? If you hate them, they'll stay around. Multiply. Thrive." He looked up at the large man slyly. "But if you *love* them —"

Hugo Martin's heavy jaw quivered, something akin to tears appearing in his stricken eyes. "Barney," he choked weakly. "Now, wait a minute, Barney, you *can't* be right —" He glanced fearfully at the Vimp glaring at him through the bars. "Anything but that, Barney — I — I couldn't *make* myself —"

"You'll just *have* to love them," said Barney firmly.

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Two frustrated tears formed in Hugo Martin's eyes, rolled down his fat cheeks. He started toward the cage, dragging his feet like a child, then stopped. "But — but what can I *do*?" he wailed. "It's like loving a centipede, or something. It's — it's sacrilegious —" He extended a hand, tentatively, toward the bars, drew it back with a jerk when the Vimp snarled. "Oh, Barney, I *can't* —"

"Look," said Barney, grinning. "I'll show you." He pulled on a pair of heavy leather gloves. Then he walked over to the cage, where the Vimp was eyeing him angrily. Barney extended a chunk of bread through the bars. "Come on, Vimp. Nice little Vimp." His voice was soft and soothing.

The Vimp snatched the bread and bit him viciously on the hand. Barney felt the anger rise, but he grinned tightly and reached in to pet the creature on the head. "Sweet little Vimp," he cooed. "*Nice* little Vimp —"

The Vimp bit him again, harder. Then it backed away, hissing, a baffled look in its eyes. It began growling in the back of its throat, baring its teeth.

"Such a cute little fellow, too," said Barney, gritting his teeth. "We're going to be such *good* friends! Come on, little fellow, let me pet you."

The Vimp was thoroughly alarmed now. Its little black eyes blazed with fear as it struggled to push backward through the bars.

"Let him go," said Barney softly. "Open the trap and let him out."

Martin clenched his big fist, walking slowly to the trap. "Gently," said Barney. "Whatever you do, *don't lose your temper.*"

Martin opened the trap gingerly. "Nice little Vimp," he rumbled tearfully. "Come on out, you dirty little —"

Barney coughed gently. Then he said, "Go on home, now, little fellow. Run along and tell all your friends how pleasant and happy things are going to be from now on —"

The Vimp hissed and snarled, then suddenly bolted. Through the window he went, pausing only to hurl back one hair-curling Vimp invective as he disappeared over the sill.

Barney heaved a deep sigh, and grinned at Hugo Martin. "There," he said.

"It won't work," wailed Martin. "We never should have let it go. It'll just be back to torment us again!"

"Not if we *love* it, it won't." Barney grinned happily. "All it takes to drive it away is a peaceful, serene atmosphere. That's hard to manage, with Vimps around — but people have got to manage it. It's the only way."

Hugo Martin looked at him entreatingly. "You don't know what you're asking for, Barney. Peaceful, serene atmosphere — people couldn't manage that even before the Vimps came. And *nobody* can be nice to a Vimp. People just won't do it."

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"Oh, yes they will," said Barney softly, "if they want to get rid of them bad enough —"

The word went out on the radios that afternoon, hit the evening papers, and exploded throughout the country. The incredible word, the ridiculous word — and people stopped swearing at Vimps to listen, and laugh derisively, and went back to swearing at Vimps. And a few enterprising individuals tried it, and found, miraculously, that it worked. One by one the Vimps began leaving, snarling, bolting like three-legged lightning out of house after house. The news spread fast. People stopped their work, their bickering and fighting, and slapping of Vimps, and saw, wonderingly, how it worked. Over town and country and village they tried it, and it worked, like a balm over the land. Finally one afternoon the radio reported that a silvery ring had appeared in a farmer's south pasture, and that Vimps by the pack and drove, hundreds and thousands of Vimps were trooping down. Barney and Flora Holder were there, along with the crowd, a curious crowd, filled with curious emotions, not knowing for sure exactly *how* they felt. But they were loving the Vimps with all the compassionate love they could muster. For very dear life they were loving the Vimps.

Flora snuggled closer to Barney and smiled happily up at him. "It's been almost fun watching them go."

Barney grinned. "It *has* been a tranquil couple of weeks," he admitted.

Flora looked up at him, her eyes moist. "I'm — I know it sounds silly, but I'm almost sorry to see them go. We — Barney, can't we pretend there are still a couple around?"

The dwindling crowd of fuzzy brown creatures disappeared one by one down the silvery ring, hunching their backs at the crowd, curling their upper lips and baring their teeth in angry snarls, hissing, scurrying, pulling each other's hair, screeching. Finally the last one stood on the edge of the ring, spat eloquently and malignantly on the ground before him, and hopped in. The ring shimmered and vanished.

As though waking from an enchanted spell, the crowd released a long sigh, and the people looked about, seeing each other for the first time, an aura of puzzled contentment rising like a wave. Barney started up the ridge toward the car, Flora's hand tight in his. He smiled down at her. "I don't know about the other people," he said softly. "But as far as I'm concerned, the Vimps never left."

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When Elmer Davis composed the constitution of that noblest of bibliophilous and bibulous organizations, the Baker Street Irregulars, he included a warning as to the dangers of meetings consisting only of two members: "If said two are of opposite sexes, they shall use care in selecting the place of meeting, to avoid misinterpretation (or interpretation either, for that matter)." But he added: "If such two persons of opposite sexes be clients of the Personal Column of 'The Saturday Review of Literature,' the foregoing does not apply; such persons being presumed to let their consciences be their guides." As a matter of fact one eminent Irregular, the foremost living authority on The Lion's Mane, *later committed the highly respectable action of acquiring a wife through an SRL ad; but most of the entries in that most provocative of advertising media seem aimed at less conventional objectives. A sustained perusal of SRL personals would, one feels sure, cause Sherlock Holmes to rate the American journal even above the agony columns of London newspapers as "the most valuable hunting-ground that ever was given to a student of the unusual." Precisely how unusual a quarry may be flushed in that hunting-ground is here related by Richard Matheson — in an interplanetary prose which only a Matheson could conceive and execute.*

SRL Ad

by RICHARD MATHESON

LONESOME VENUS GAL, pretty — yes, nice in socializing; tender and gay altogether. Be pleased to write, earthman of like fixtures. LOOLIE ח-כ GREENER ⅃⅂⅃ ABODE, VENUS.

July 5, 1951

Dear Loolie,

I don't know what I'm getting myself in for, but I'm too tired to care. Ever spend a night on astro-physical calculus? I just did and I'm groggy.

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So I'm taking your ad straight. What the heck, it doesn't matter. Sat down for a relaxing half hour before sacking out and I feel like shooting off my big typewriter so here I am with a cup of java.

I don't care if you live on Venus or Pluto or in a little grass shack in Kehalick Kahooey Hawaii. I just hope you're not selling something.

You know, it *would* be interesting to know if there really was anyone on Venus, on Mars or any other of those damn rolling spitballs that circle old Sol for a good punch.

Okay. I'll assume you know nothing about Earth. So you don't know a ting. Dat's slang. Don't you jes love Earth, LONESOME VENUS GAL?

What's the game old gal? What's the double-talk? Socializing. I'll have you investigated s'blood.

Pretty — yes. What's that?

As for me: pretty — no.

But I'm gay altogether too. I wake up late at night and just gay altogether all over the place. 'Specially if Willy and I (my room-mate) have imbibed a few tankards of that mizzible brew they say is squeezed from the waving grain.

You have beer on Venus?

Venus. Venus. One Touch of. That's a musical show down here. Venus was goddess of Love, I believe. Do you look like Mary Martin? Guess not. If you happen to look like Ava Gardner — hold that rocket ship Sam, I'm packin' mah duds now.

Who am I? This repulsive young lad who communicates in semi-facetious vein? Who regales yo poor blinkers wif giddy persiflage?

Name's Todd Baker. Taking the Astronomy Unit here at Fort College in Fort, Indiana. College endowed by a rich old bugger who went off his nut over the Fortean prose.

You know, it just struck me that if you were really on Venus (which I keep forgetting because I think that's a load of — *ah* ha ha!)

Anyway, if you really were on the misty ghost world out thar yonder, you wouldn't be able to make head nor tail of my confused rambling.

So — for regimentation — for mental exercise — I'll pretend you *are* up there: mean distance from sun 67.2 million miles, eccentricity .0068, inclination to elliptic 3° 23′ 38″.

Pardon. Carried away by the figures which leap about my mind like potted sitatungas. That's the way you get after a while. Integration. Differential. Function of a function. Stay away gal! Better to be lonesome on Venus.

I am of the males. I am sane, foregoing epistolary matter to the contrary.

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I have been here at Fort College these three grotesque years preparing myself for a life of fabulous obscurity studying those pinpoints in yon blackness that someone had the audacity to put there.

Could I not be a plumber? Cry in the night. Not me. I must stick a thermometer in the gullet of stars and diagnose — hmmmm, the patient is getting old. He has only 95 billion years to live.

Okay. No distracting and altogether ungay and unsuccessful metaphors and snappy patter.

This is Earth. It has a diameter of about 7960 miles. Do not ask why. This is a secret.

I am an Earth man of like fixtures. I am 26. This means that I have been undergoing a process of physical and mental growth (well, physical anyway) for 26 x 365 days. It takes the Earth 365 days to get around the sun, a day being one revolution of said solar handball around its own axis.

On Earth, on this continent, the piece of earth in this hemisphere that Davey Jones has not seen fit to stash away in his everloving locker, there is a country called the United States of America. In it is Indiana. In Indiana is Fort. In Fort is Fort College. In college is me. In me is idiocy for writing to any gal who says she's from Venus.

Tell you what I'm gonna do.

You tell me about Venus. We'uns down hyar can't see it you know. Somebody up there is smoking a damnably large cigar.

So, you give me some figures on Venus. Might even send me a few samples of rocks, plants, dirt and so on. How about it? Trapped you, ay?

Anyway, even though you're just a joker from Mother Earth and way back, drop me a line when next you feel the pressure on your brain.

And now to sack. Good night's sleep tonight; all of four hours.

I take it back. Willy is snoring.

Greetings from the wheeling green place,

Todd Baker
1729 "J" Street
Fort, Indiana

July 7, 1951

Oh Dear Toddbaker,

Was it nice to hear from you. Am endless grateful. How good. I wish to have a newer translate book there isn't here. You see? "Forgive me dear."

I have got your message. Fast it came fast, picked up by my guardians. So happy am I that you have messaged to LOOLIE. I got no more than

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yours'. I would not be even happy if there was not an answer at all. I worked in muchness to put the note on me in the place you saw. It is good English what?

There is lot that was not known in your message. Old translate book see you. Cup of joe not there. Nor yet everloving as so common adjective. Or handball. Or Kehalick Kahooey Hawaii. This is a planet?

I am here. On CU87. What you call Venus. Nice ting. Slang. Right? "You are dear to me."

Oh, of yes, I am loving Earth. But most its Toddbaker. I did not plan for me to stay there with you after — wait now. I must look for the properness word. After . . . marriage¡ No. !

No. I had think you come to my planet. But later is time for that to decide. No worries is there dear?

Socializing. That is wrong now see I. I am soci-able. I can have many childs. Ten at a time at once. You will be proud. And pretty — yes. I am. And you I know will be handsome. I know. We will be so happiness. Oh! "My dear it is good to know."

I am not goddess of Love. But I love you — any how? This seems not a question. But in the translate book is always ? after *how*. Is it?

I am glad you own a room-mate. Of natural he can not stay with us here on CU87. How ever if Willy, as you say it, wants another Lonesome Venus Gal I can do it. I know many. All as pretty — yes as I am pretty. Yes.

Mary Martian? I did not know that your planet was in messaging action with the 4th from CU. We had not thinked it livable. This is good yet. I have told our skymen. They are glad to know this. Davey Jones and Ava Gardner is not known. Who is Sam?

Oh dear you are not repulsive. I am know that you are loveliness. We will be lovely with each other together. How dear. Many babies. Hundred. My¡ — ! I forget.

Fort, I am not knowing. I picked a spot with a point and had my guardians go down to tell of my lonesome. I am the first to try. If it works good and it worked good — yes. Then I will tell the rest of mine. I have two hundred and seven sisters. Nice. All pretty. You will like them when they see you.

Figures you said are all not right. But all right for that. I am giving an extra page of notes. See how they show. Formulas, laws and truths of matter here. In a box I will sending some samples of rock and on so.

I am L-. This means I think 8.5 in your numbers. I am very young. I hope it does not mind you to marriage with such a . . . a child. I can bear already babies. Two hundred at least, of course.

And now I will have send this message from your LOOLIE. I will now come soon to get you. You will of real like it more on CU87 than on

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your icy colded Earth with so lacking warm and air enough. Here is so fulsome warmth all in the U'. U' — year in your talk. 224.7 days. Almost.

Now. Dear Toddbaker. Here is fare well for a nonce. Soon come I. How happy will we be? Yes! "My dear it is love I send. A kiss."

LOOLIE

1729 "J" Street
Fort, Indiana
July 10, 1951

Personals Department
The Saturday Review
25 West 45th Street
New York 19, New York

Dear Sirs:

I wish to make an inquiry regarding an ad published in your July 3rd issue from a "LONESOME VENUS GAL".

I wrote to this person who claimed to be a resident of the planet Venus. I naturally assumed the claim to be facetious.

Two days after sending my letter I received an answer.

The fact that this letter was written in gibberish does not, in itself, prove anything.

However, with the letter came a sheet of mathematical statistics and a box of mineral and plant samples which this so-called "VENUS GAL" said were from her planet.

A professor at my college — Fort — is now examining the samples and testing the statistics. He has not made any statement.

But I am virtually certain that the samples are of a variety unknown to Earth. They *are*, actually, from another planet. I am almost positive of that.

I would like to know how this person, or whatever she is, managed to communicate with you and get such an ad in your magazine.

According to your own written standards, it would seem that this advertisement, by its very nature, was far from a communication "of a decorous nature."

This "Venus gal" Loolie speaks of *marrying* me — coming down here and getting me.

Please rush a reply. The matter is highly urgent.

Thanking you, I am

Very truly yours,
Todd Baker

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July 11, 1951

Dear Mr. Baker:

Your letter of the 10th at hand.

We must confess ignorance of its meaning.

In our July 3rd issue there was no such ad as you described placed in our Classified Section.

We are of the opinion that you have been the unfortunate butt of a practical joke.

However, we are in communication with one of our territorial representatives in Fort and he is investigating the matter.

If we can be of further service, please feel free to call on us.

Mr. Todd Baker
1729 "J" Street
Fort, Indiana

Sincerely yours,
J. Linton Freedhoffer
For the Editor

Professor Reed,

Dropped in to see you but you weren't in your office.

Any news?

I'm getting awfully worried. If you find that those samples are as legitimate as I think they are, I'm sunk. I get the shudders every time I think about what fantastic powers this Loolie must have. How she got that ad in the *SRL* I'll never figure out.

I certainly hope it *is* a practical joke.

If it isn't. . . .

Will you let me know as soon as you reach any definite decision?

Todd Baker

Toddy Lad: ; . ? !

Prof. Reed called up. Said he found out that the samples (whatever they are) are strictly legit. Really come from someplace other than Earth. Who's he kidding? Oops. Sorry Charles.

Anyway, the old boy says for you to come over to his house tonight for a big pow-wow. Playing teacher's pet? For shame.

Off to supper.

Adoringly
Your room mate
The Eternal Sophomore
Willy

P.S. Letter came for you.

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July 11, 1951

Oh Dear Toddbaker,

Think! How fortune it is. I have got a special space ship. I can come now right away tomorrow. Oh happiness. "Pack your duds dear". I am coming to bring you back with me. I am so joyfull. Please hurry.

With everything
LOOLIE

LOOLIE!

No! You can't do this! I'm an Earth-man. I'm happy to be an Earth-man. Let me stay one! Keep away. I'm not going *anywhere* with you. I'm warning you.

Please?

Stay away!

T. Baker

P.S. I got a shotgun! Look out! !

(*From the Fort Daily Tribune, July 13, 1951*)

FLOATING GLOBE SIGHTED
OVER COLLEGE CAMPUS

More than thirty students and citizens of Fort claimed to have sighted a floating globe last night.

According to the reports, the globe hovered over the college campus for at least ten minutes. It then headed for the outskirts of the city where it disappeared.

U—'

Dear Tell Book:

Well, I'm back. I can't understand it. I've been taken in, I have. It seems so odd.

I went to such trouble to put the insert in that Earth publication. And then this Toddbaker went to all the trouble of writing back. And I thought — here now! — I have a mate at last. He seemed so interested and *so* nice.

But heavens. When I told him that we were to be co-joined he protested as if this were something terrible. What sense in that? I thought he was just being shy as are all the depleted males up here.

So, on the third phase, I got into the ship (which I had gone to oh! such trouble to get). I was down there in about seven eks.

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I stayed there a little less than a half ek, suspended over a green place with tall structures. There with the use of the proto-finder I located the waves of Toddbaker and headed for this "J" Street.

I landed behind his personal structure.

I got out and went over to this place. I sensed his presence with my portable proto. The waves were coming freely through a square hole high up on the wall.

I turned on my air belt and floated up there.

There I went into this hole. It was a terrible squeeze.

There he was.

Such a shock!

He was holding something long and shiny in his hands and he pointed it at me. But then he dropped it on the floor and said something.

I do not see how these Earth men understand each other. It was so weird a gurgle and it stuck in him. He stared at me and the voice cavity got large. Then it spread wide across and showed his teeth.

Then the seeing organs in his top part rolled back and disappeared. I suppose it was my air cloud that made it happen. He put out his arms at me and took one step; but then he fell down on the floor with a squeaking noise. He said sounds like "Bruh *Therr!*"

I went over to him and examined.

My my.

He was not of like fixtures at all. It could not possibly be managed. He is so fragile and pale. It is doubtful that the whole race of them can last. Not with such a form. So little!

So I left him there, poor thing.

And I had been so happy before. Now I'm still lonesome. I want a mate.

And now what? Nothing I guess. Well, maybe one.

July 20, 1951

Dear Mrs. Baker,

I think you'd better come and take Todd home. He's in a sad way.

He's cutting all his classes and he doesn't eat. All he does is sit around the room and stare at things. He hasn't slept more than a few hours for a week and when he did fall asleep he kept talking to himself, calling for "Louie". We don't know any Louie.

I found the enclosed in the basket this afternoon. I don't get it.

But you better get Todd.

In haste,
Willy Haskell

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(*Enclosure*)
Dear Sir:

We regret to inform you that your personal advertisement is not acceptable for our classified section.

We return it herewith.

(*Enclosure*)

LOOLIE: I'm sorry. I didn't know you were so wonderful. Won't you please come back? I'll be waiting. Love, Todd.

LONESOME VENUS GAL, pretty — yes, nice in socializing, tender and gay altogether. Be pleased to write Mars man of like fixtures. Note: Am friends with Mary Martian. LOOLIE ח-כ GREENER ⅃⅂⅃ ABODE, VENUS.

The Believing Press

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, devout exponent of spiritualism and creator of literature's greatest detective, Sherlock Holmes, and the equally eminent protagonist of science fiction, Professor Challenger, died on July 7, 1930. On May 24, 1938, the San Francisco "Chronicle" published this notice:

FAMOUS BOOKED FOR TOWN HALL

Twenty internationally famed personalities, authors, scientists, hypnotists, journalists, dancers and educators will visit San Francisco between October of this year and April of 1939 under auspices of the San Francisco Town Hall . . .

Among those scheduled to appear are Hedda Hopper, The Chronicle's Hollywood columnist; Marjorie Hillis, who lived alone, liked it, made it pay; . . . Dr. Franz Polgar, telepathist and hypnotist; Dr. Abram Sachar, historian and biographer; . . . Conan Doyle, to whom life after death is a reality . . .

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The relationship and interchange of forms between men and seals is firmly established in all sea-coast legendry; the were-seal is possibly second only to the werewolf among the classic man-into-beast themes of therianthropy. Eric Linklater is an always attractive and always surprising author, as you'll remember from (to mention only his most recent books) 1950's splendid fantasy of giants, A SPELL FOR OLD BONES, *or 1951's uniquely subtle novel of murder,* MR. BYCULLA. *In* Sealskin Trousers *(the title story of a volume published in London in 1947 by Rupert Hart-Davis, who more recently introduced Bradbury to England), he has combined an admirably written psychological story with a fascinating study in the possible biological origins of the were-seal, converting therianthropy (as Jack Williamson, on the basis of quite different theories, did in* DARKER THAN YOU THINK) *from supernatural fantasy into a provocatively imaginative form of science fiction.*

Sealskin Trousers

by ERIC LINKLATER

I AM NOT MAD. It is necessary to realise that, to accept it as a fact about which there can be no dispute. I have been seriously ill for some weeks, but that was the result of shock. A double or conjoint shock: for as well as the obvious concussion of a brutal event, there was the more dreadful necessity of recognising the material evidence of a happening so monstrously implausible that even my friends here, who in general are quite extraordinarily kind and understanding, will not believe in the occurrence, though they cannot deny it or otherwise explain — I mean explain away — the clear and simple testimony of what was left.

I, of course, realised very quickly what had happened, and since then I have more than once remembered that poor Coleridge teased his unquiet mind, quite unnecessarily in his case, with just such a possibility; or impossibility, as the world would call it. "If a man could pass through Paradise in a dream," he wrote, "and have a flower presented to him as a pledge that his soul had really been there, and if he found that flower in his hand when he woke — Ay, and what then?"

But what if he had dreamt of Hell and wakened with his hand burnt by

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the fire? Or of Chaos, and seen another face stare at him from the looking-glass? Coleridge does not push the question far. He was too timid. But I accepted the evidence, and while I was ill I thought seriously about the whole proceeding, in detail and in sequence of detail. I thought, indeed, about little else. To begin with, I admit, I was badly shaken, but gradually my mind cleared and my vision improved, and because I was patient and persevering — that needed discipline — I can now say that I know what happened. I have indeed, by a conscious intellectual effort, *seen and heard* what happened. This is how it began. . . .

How very unpleasant! she thought.

She had come down the great natural steps on the sea-cliff to the ledge that narrowly gave access, round the angle of it, to the western face which to-day was sheltered from the breeze and warmed by the afternoon sun. At the beginning of the week she and her fiancé, Charles Sellin, had found their way to an almost hidden shelf, a deep veranda sixty feet above the white-veined water. It was rather bigger than a billiard-table and nearly as private as an abandoned lighthouse. Twice they had spent some blissful hours there. She had a good head for heights, and Sellin was indifferent to scenery. There had been nothing vulgar, no physical contact, in their bliss together on this oceanic gazebo, for on each occasion she had been reading Héaloin's *Studies in Biology* and he Lenin's *What Is to Be Done?*

Their relations were already marital, not because their mutual passion could brook no pause, but rather out of fear lest their friends might despise them for chastity and so conjecture some oddity or impotence in their nature. Their behaviour, however, was very decently circumspect, and they already conducted themselves, in public and out of doors, as if they had been married for several years. They did not regard the seclusion of the cliffs as an opportunity for secret embracing, but were content that the sun should warm and colour their skin; and let their anxious minds be soothed by the surge and cavernous colloquies of the sea. Now, while Charles was writing letters in the little fishing-hotel a mile away, she had come back to their sandstone ledge, and Charles would join her in an hour or two. She was still reading *Studies in Biology*.

But their gazebo, she perceived, was already occupied, and occupied by a person of the most embarrassing appearance. He was quite unlike Charles. He was not only naked, but obviously robust, brown-hued, and extremely hairy. He sat on the very edge of the rock, dangling his legs over the sea, and down his spine ran a ridge of hair like the dark stripe on a donkey's back, and on his shoulder-blades grew patches of hair like the wings of a bird. Unable in her disappointment to be sensible and leave at once, she

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lingered for a moment and saw to her relief that he was not quite naked. He wore trousers of a dark brown colour, very low at the waist, but sufficient to cover his haunches. Even so, even with that protection for her modesty, she could not stay and read biology in his company.

To show her annoyance, and let him become aware of it, she made a little impatient sound; and turning to go, looked back to see if he had heard.

He swung himself round and glared at her, more angry on the instant than she had been. He had thick eyebrows, large dark eyes, a broad snub nose, a big mouth. "You're Roger Fairfield!" she exclaimed in surprise.

He stood up and looked at her intently. "How do you know?" he asked.

"Because I remember you," she answered, but then felt a little confused, for what she principally remembered was the brief notoriety he had acquired, in his final year at Edinburgh University, by swimming on a rough autumn day from North Berwick to the Bass Rock to win a bet of five pounds.

The story had gone briskly round the town for a week, and everybody knew that he and some friends had been lunching, too well for caution, before the bet was made. His friends, however, grew quickly sober when he took to the water, and in a great fright informed the police, who called out the lifeboat. But they searched in vain, for the sea was running high, until in calm water under the shelter of the Bass they saw his head, dark on the water, and pulled him aboard. He seemed none the worse for his adventure, but the police charged him with disorderly behaviour and he was fined two pounds for swimming without a regulation costume.

"We met twice," she said, "once at a dance and once in Mackie's when we had coffee together. About a year ago. There were several of us there, and we knew the man you came in with. I remember you perfectly."

He stared the harder, his eyes narrowing, a vertical wrinkle dividing his forehead. "I'm a little short-sighted too," she said with a nervous laugh.

"My sight's very good," he answered, "but I find it difficult to recognise people. Human beings are so much alike."

"That's one of the rudest remarks I've ever heard!"

"Surely not?"

"Well, one does like to be remembered. It isn't pleasant to be told that one's a nonentity."

He made an impatient gesture. "That isn't what I meant, and I do recognise you now. I remember your voice. You have a distinctive voice and a pleasant one. F sharp in the octave below middle C is your note."

"Is that the only way in which you can distinguish people?"

"It's as good as any other."

"But you don't remember my name?"

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"No," he said.

"I'm Elizabeth Barford."

He bowed and said, "Well, it was a dull party, wasn't it? The occasion, I mean, when we drank coffee together."

"I don't agree with you. I thought it was very amusing, and we all enjoyed ourselves. Do you remember Charles Sellin?"

"No."

"Oh, you're hopeless," she exclaimed. "What is the good of meeting people if you're going to forget all about them?"

"I don't know," he said. "Let us sit down, and you can tell me."

He sat again on the edge of the rock, his legs dangling, and looking over his shoulder at her, said, "Tell me: what is the good of meeting people?"

She hesitated, and answered, "I like to make friends. That's quite natural, isn't it? — But I came here to read."

"Do you read standing?"

"Of course not," she said, and smoothing her skirt tidily over her knees, sat down beside him. "What a wonderful place this is for a holiday. Have you been here before?"

"Yes, I know it well."

"Charles and I came a week ago. Charles Sellin, I mean, whom you don't remember. We're going to be married, you know. In about a year, we hope."

"Why did you come here?"

"We wanted to be quiet, and in these islands one is fairly secure against interruption. We're both working quite hard."

"Working!" he mocked. "Don't waste time, waste your life instead."

"Most of us have to work, whether we like it or not."

He took the book from her lap, and opening it read idly a few lines, turned a dozen pages and read with a yawn another paragraph.

"Your friends in Edinburgh," she said, "were better-off than ours. Charles and I, and all the people we know, have got to make our living."

"Why?" he asked.

"Because if we don't we shall starve," she snapped.

"And if you avoid starvation — what then?"

"It's possible to hope," she said stiffly, "that we shall be of some use in the world."

"Do you agree with this?" he asked, smothering a second yawn, and read from the book: " '*The physical factor in a germ-cell is beyond our analysis or assessment, but can we deny subjectivity to the primordial initiatives? It is easier, perhaps, to assume that mind comes late in development, but the assumption must not be established on the grounds that we can certainly deny self-expression to the cell. It is common knowledge that the mind may influence the body both*

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greatly and in little unseen ways; but how it is done, we do not know. Psychobiology is still in its infancy.'"

"It's fascinating, isn't it?" she said.

"How do you propose," he asked, "to be of use to the world?"

"Well, the world needs people who have been educated — educated to think — and one does hope to have a little influence in some way."

"Is a little influence going to make any difference? Don't you think that what the world needs is to develop a new sort of mind? It needs a new primordial directive, or quite a lot of them, perhaps. But psychobiology is still in its infancy, and you don't know how such changes come about, do you? And you can't foresee when you *will* know, can you?"

"No, of course not. But science is advancing so quickly —"

"In fifty thousand years?" he interrupted. "Do you think you will know by then?"

"It's difficult to say," she answered seriously, and was gathering her thoughts for a careful reply when again he interrupted, rudely, she thought, and quite irrelevantly. His attention had strayed from her and her book to the sea beneath, and he was looking down as though searching for something. "Do you swim?" he asked.

"Rather well," she said.

"I went in just before high water, when the weed down there was all brushed in the opposite direction. You never get bored by the sea, do you?"

"I've never seen enough of it," she said. "I want to live on an island, a little island, and hear it all round me."

"That's very sensible of you," he answered with more warmth in his voice. "That's uncommonly sensible for a girl like you."

"What sort of a girl do you think I am?" she demanded, vexation in her accent, but he ignored her and pointed his brown arm to the horizon: "The colour has thickened within the last few minutes. The sea was quite pale on the skyline, and now it's a belt of indigo. And the writing has changed. The lines of foam on the water, I mean. Look at that! There's a submerged rock out there, and always, about half an hour after the ebb has started to run, but more clearly when there's an off-shore wind, you can see those two little whirlpools and the circle of white round them. You see the figure they make? It's like this, isn't it?"

With a splinter of stone he drew a diagram on the rock.

"Do you know what it is?" he asked. "It's the figure the Chinese call the T'ai Chi. They say it represents the origin of all created things. And it's the sign manual of the sea."

"But those lines of foam must run into every conceivable shape," she protested.

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"Oh, they do. They do indeed. But it isn't often you can read them. — There he is!" he exclaimed, leaning forward and staring into the water sixty feet below. "That's him, the old villain!"

From his sitting position, pressing hard down with his hands and thrusting against the face of the rock with his heels, he hurled himself into space, and straightening in mid-air broke the smooth green surface of the water with no more splash than a harpoon would have made. A solitary razorbill, sunning himself on a shelf below, fled hurriedly out to sea, and half a dozen white birds rose in the air crying, "Kittiwake! Kittiwake!"

Elizabeth screamed loudly, scrambled to her feet with clumsy speed, then knelt again on the edge of the rock and peered down. In the slowly heaving clear water she could see a pale shape moving, now striped by the dark weed that grew in tangles under the flat foot of the rock, now lost in the shadowy deepness where the tangles were rooted. In a minute or two his head rose from the sea, he shook bright drops from his hair, and looked up at her, laughing. Firmly grasped in his right hand, while he trod water, he held up an enormous blue-black lobster for her admiration. Then he threw it on to the flat rock beside him, and swiftly climbing out of the sea, caught it again and held it, cautious of its bite, till he found a piece of string in his trouser-pocket. He shouted to her, "I'll tie its claws, and you can take it home for your supper!"

She had not thought it possible to climb the sheer face of the cliff, but from its forefoot he mounted by steps and handholds invisible from above, and pitching the tied lobster on to the floor of the gazebo, came nimbly over the edge.

"That's a bigger one than you've ever seen in your life before," he boasted. "He weighs fourteen pounds, I'm certain of it. Fourteen pounds at least. Look at the size of his right claw! He could crack a coconut with that. He tried to crack my ankle when I was swimming an hour ago, and got into his hole before I could catch him. But I've caught him now, the brute. He's had more than twenty years of crime, that black boy. He's twenty-four or twenty-five by the look of him. He's older than you, do you realise that? Unless you're a lot older than you look. How old are you?"

But Elizabeth took no interest in the lobster. She had retreated until she stood with her back to the rock, pressed hard against it, the palms of her hands fumbling on the stone as if feeling for a secret lock or bolt that might give her entrance into it. Her face was white, her lips pale and tremulous.

He looked round at her, when she made no answer, and asked what the matter was.

Her voice was faint and frightened. "Who are you?" she whispered, and the whisper broke into a stammer. "What are you?"

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His expression changed and his face, with the waterdrops on it, grew hard as a rock shining undersea. "It's only a few minutes," he said, "since you appeared to know me quite well. You addressed me as Roger Fairfield."

"But a name's not everything. It doesn't tell you enough."

"What more do you want to know?"

Her voice was so strained and thin that her words were like the shadow of words: "To jump like that, into the sea — it wasn't human!"

The coldness of his face wrinkled to a frown. "That's a curious remark."

"You would have killed yourself if — if —"

He took a seaward step again, looked down at the calm green depths below, and said, "You're exaggerating, aren't you? It's not much more than fifty feet, sixty, perhaps, and the water's deep. — Here, come back! Why are you running away?"

"Let me go!" she cried. "I don't want to stay here. I — I'm frightened."

"That's unfortunate. I hadn't expected this to happen."

"Please let me go!"

"I don't think I shall. Not until you've told me what you're frightened of."

"Why," she stammered, "why do you wear fur trousers?"

He laughed, and still laughing caught her round the waist and pulled her towards the edge of the rock. "Don't be alarmed," he said. "I'm not going to throw you over. But if you insist on a conversation about trousers, I think we should sit down again. Look at the smoothness of the water, and its colour, and the light in the depths of it: have you ever seen anything lovelier? Look at the sky: that's calm enough, isn't it?"

She leaned away from him, all her weight against the hand that held her waist, but his arm was strong and he seemed unaware of any strain on it. Nor did he pay attention to the distress she was in — she was sobbing dryly, like a child who has cried too long — but continued talking in a light and pleasant conversational tone until the muscles of her body tired and relaxed, and she sat within his enclosing arm, making no more effort to escape, but timorously conscious of his hand upon her side so close beneath her breast.

"I needn't tell you," he said, "the conventional reasons for wearing trousers. There are people, I know, who sneer at all conventions; and some conventions deserve their sneering. But not the trouser-convention. No, indeed! So we can admit the necessity of the garment, and pass to consideration of the material. Well, I like sitting on rocks, for one thing, and for such a hobby this is the best stuff in the world. It's very durable, yet soft and comfortable. I can slip into the sea for half an hour without doing it any harm, and when I come out to sun myself on the rock again, it doesn't feel cold and clammy. Nor does it fade in the sun or shrink with the wet.

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Oh, there are plenty of reasons for having one's trousers made of stuff like this."

"And there's a reason," she said, "that you haven't told me."

"Are you quite sure of that?"

She was calmer now, and her breathing was controlled. But her face was still white, and her lips were softly nervous when she asked him, "Are you going to kill me?"

"Kill you? Good heavens, no! Why should I do that?"

"For fear of my telling other people."

"And what precisely would you tell them?"

"You know."

"You jump to conclusions far too quickly: that's your trouble. Well, it's a pity for your sake, and a nuisance for me. I don't think I can let you take that lobster home for your supper after all. I don't, in fact, think you will go home for your supper."

Her eyes grew dark again with fear, her mouth opened, but before she could speak he pulled her to him and closed it, not asking leave, with a roughly occludent kiss.

"That was to prevent you from screaming. I hate to hear people scream," he told her, smiling as he spoke. "But this" — he kissed her again, now gently and in a more protracted embrace — "that was because I wanted to."

"You mustn't!" she cried.

"But I have," he said.

"I don't understand myself! I can't understand what has happened —"

"Very little yet," he murmured.

"Something terrible has happened!"

"A kiss? Am I so repulsive?"

"I don't mean that. I mean something inside me. I'm not — at least I think I'm not — I'm not frightened now!"

"You have no reason to be."

"I have every reason in the world. But I'm not! I'm not frightened — but I want to cry."

"Then cry," he said soothingly, and made her pillow her cheek against his breast. "But you can't cry comfortably with that ridiculous contraption on your nose."

He took from her the horn-rimmed spectacles she wore, and threw them into the sea.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "My glasses! — Oh, why did you do that? Now I can't see. I can't see at all without my glasses!"

"It's all right," he assured her. "You really won't need them. The refraction," he added vaguely, "will be quite different."

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As if this small but unexpected act of violence had brought to the boiling-point her desire for tears, they bubbled over, and because she threw her arms about him in a sort of fond despair, and snuggled close, sobbing vigorously still, he felt the warm drops trickle down his skin, and from his skin she drew into her eyes the saltness of the sea, which made her weep the more. He stroked her hair with a strong but soothing hand, and when she grew calm and lay still in his arms, her emotion spent, he sang quietly to a little enchanting tune a song that began:

"I am a Man upon the land,
I am a Selkie in the sea,
And when I'm far from every strand
My home it is on Sule Skerry."

After the first verse or two she freed herself from his embrace, and sitting up listed to the song. Then she asked him, "Shall I ever understand?"

"It's not a unique occurrence," he told her. "It has happened quite often before, as I suppose you know. In Cornwall and Brittany and among the Western Isles of Scotland; that's where people have always been interested in seals, and understood them a little, and where seals from time to time have taken human shape. The one thing that's unique in our case, in my metamorphosis, is that I am the only seal-man who has ever become a Master of Arts of Edinburgh University. Or, I believe, of any university. I am the unique and solitary example of a sophisticated seal-man."

"I must look a perfect fright," she said. "Are my eyes very red?"

"The lids are a little pink — not unattractively so — but your eyes are as dark and lovely as a mountain pool in October, on a sunny day in October. They're much improved since I threw your spectacles away."

"I needed them, you know. I feel quite stupid without them. But tell me why you came to the University — and how? How could you do it?"

"My dear girl — what is your name, by the way? I've quite forgotten."

"Elizabeth!" she said angrily.

"I'm so glad, it's my favourite human name. — But you don't really want to listen to a lecture on psychobiology?"

"I want to know *how*. You must tell me!"

"Well, you remember, don't you, what your book says about the primordial initiatives? But it needs a footnote there to explain that they're not exhausted till quite late in life. The germ-cells, as you know, are always renewing themselves, and they keep their initiatives though they nearly always follow the chosen pattern except in the case of certain illnesses, or under special direction. The direction of the mind, that is. And the glands have got a lot to do in a full metamorphosis, the renal first and then the

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pituitary, as you would expect. It isn't approved of — making the change, I mean — but every now and then one of us does it, just for a frolic in the general way, but in my case there was a special reason."

"Tell me," she said again.

"There's been a good deal of unrest, you see, among my people in the last few years: doubt, and dissatisfaction with our leaders, and scepticism about traditional beliefs — all that sort of thing. We've had a lot of discussion under the surface of the sea about the nature of man, for instance. We had always been taught to believe certain things about him, and recent events didn't seem to bear out what our teachers told us. Some of our younger people got dissatisfied, so I volunteered to go ashore and investigate. I'm still considering the report I shall have to make, and that's why I'm living, at present, a double life. I come ashore to think, and go back to the sea to rest."

"And what do you think of us?" she asked.

"You're interesting. Very interesting indeed. There are going to be some curious mutations among you before long. Within three or four thousand years, perhaps."

He stopped and rubbed a little smear of blood from his skin. "I scratched it on a limpet," he said. "The limpets, you know, are the same to-day as they were four hundred thousand years ago. But human beings aren't nearly so stable."

"Is that your main impression, that humanity's unstable?"

"That's part of it. But from our point of view there's something much more upsetting. Our people, you see, are quite simple creatures, and because we have relatively few beliefs, we're very much attached to them. Our life is a life of sensation — not entirely, but largely — and we ought to be extremely happy. We were, so long as we were satisfied with sensation and a short undisputed creed. We have some advantages over human beings, you know. Human beings have to carry their own weight about, and they don't know how blissful it is to be unconscious of weight: to be wave-borne, to float on the idle sea, to leap without effort in a curving wave, and look up at the dazzle of the sky through a smother of white water, or dive so easily to the calmness far below and take a haddock from the weed-beds in a sudden rush of appetite. — Talking of haddocks," he said, "it's getting late. It's nearly time for fish. And I must give you some instruction before we go. The preliminary phase takes a little while, about five minutes for you, I should think, and then you'll be another creature."

She gasped, as though already she felt the water's chill, and whispered, "Not yet! Not yet, please."

He took her in his arms, and expertly, with a strong caressing hand,

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stroked her hair, stroked the roundness of her head and the back of her neck and her shoulders, feeling her muscles moving to his touch, and down the hollow of her back to her waist and hips. The head again, neck, shoulders, and spine. Again and again. Strongly and firmly his hand gave her calmness, and presently she whispered, "You're sending me to sleep."

"My God!" he exclaimed, "you mustn't do that! Stand up, Elizabeth!"

"Yes," she said, obeying him. "Yes, Roger. Why did you call yourself Roger? Roger Fairfield?"

"I found the name in a drowned sailor's pay-book. What does that matter now? Look at me, Elizabeth!"

She looked at him, and smiled.

His voice changed, and he said happily, "You'll be the prettiest seal between Shetland and the Scillies. Now listen. Listen carefully."

He held her lightly and whispered in her ear. Then kissed her on the lips and cheek, and bending her head back, on the throat. He looked, and saw the colour come deeply into her face.

"Good," he said. "That's the first stage. The adrenalin's flowing nicely now. You know about the pituitary, don't you? That makes it easy then. There are two parts in the pituitary gland, the anterior and posterior lobes, and both must act together. It's not difficult, and I'll tell you how."

Then he whispered again, most urgently, and watched her closely. In a little while he said, "And now you can take it easy. Let's sit down and wait till you're ready. The actual change won't come till we go down."

"But it's working," she said, quietly and happily. "I can feel it working."

"Of course it is."

She laughed triumphantly, and took his hand.

"We've got nearly five minutes to wait," he said.

"What will it be like? What shall I feel, Roger?"

"The water moving against your side, the sea caressing you."

"Shall I be sorry for what I've left behind?"

"No, I don't think so."

"You didn't like us, then? Tell me what you discovered in the world."

"Quite simply," he said, "that we had been deceived."

"But I don't know what your belief had been."

"Haven't I told you? — Well, we in our innocence respected you because you could work, and were willing to work. That seemed to us truly heroic. We don't work at all, you see, and you'll be much happier when you come to us. We who live in the sea don't struggle to keep our heads above water."

"All my friends worked hard," she said. "I never knew anyone who was idle. We had to work, and most of us worked for a good purpose; or so we thought. But you didn't think so?"

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"Our teachers had told us," he said, "that men endured the burden of human toil to create a surplus of wealth that would give them leisure from the daily task of breadwinning. And in their hard-won leisure, our teachers said, men cultivated wisdom and charity and the fine arts; and became aware of God. — But that's not a true description of the world, is it?"

"No," she said, "that's not the truth."

"No," he repeated, "our teachers were wrong, and we've been deceived."

"Men are always being deceived, but they get accustomed to learning the facts too late. They grow accustomed to deceit itself."

"You are braver than we, perhaps. My people will not like to be told the truth."

"I shall be with you," she said, and took his hand.

The minutes passed, and presently she stood up and with quick fingers put off her clothes. "It's time," she said.

He looked at her, and his gloom vanished like the shadow of a cloud that the wind has hurried on, and exultation followed like sunlight spilling from the burning edge of a cloud. "I wanted to punish them," he cried, "for robbing me of my faith, and now, by God, I'm punishing them hard. I'm robbing their treasury now, the inner vault of all their treasury! — I hadn't guessed you were so beautiful! The waves when you swim will catch a burnish from you, the sand will shine like silver when you lie down to sleep, and if you can teach the red sea-ware to blush so well, I shan't miss the roses of your world."

"Hurry," she said.

He, laughing softly, loosened the leather thong that tied his trousers, stepped out of them, and lifted her in his arms. "Are you ready?" he asked.

She put her arms round his neck and softly kissed his cheek. Then with a great shout he leapt from the rock, from the little veranda, into the green silk calm of the water far below. . . .

I heard the splash of their descent — I am quite sure I heard the splash — as I came round the corner of the cliff, by the ledge that leads to the little rock veranda, our gazebo, as we called it, but the first thing I noticed, that really attracted my attention, was an enormous blue-black lobster, its huge claws tied with string, that was moving in a rather ludicrous fashion towards the edge. I think it fell over just before I left, but I wouldn't swear to that. Then I saw her book, the *Studies in Biology*, and her clothes.

Her white linen frock with the brown collar and the brown belt, some other garments, and her shoes were all there. And beside them, lying across her shoes, was a pair of sealskin trousers.

I realised immediately, or almost immediately, what had happened. Or so

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it seems to me now. And if, as I firmly believe, my apprehension was instantaneous, the faculty of intuition is clearly more important than I had previously supposed. I have, of course, as I said before, given the matter a great deal of thought during my recent illness, but the impression remains that I understood what had happened in a flash, to use a common but illuminating phrase. And no one, need I say? has been able to refute my intuition. No one, that is, has found an alternative explanation for the presence, beside Elizabeth's linen frock, of a pair of sealskin trousers.

I remember also my physical distress at the discovery. My breath, for several minutes I think, came into and went out of my lungs like the hot wind of a dust-storm in the desert. It parched my mouth and grated in my throat. It was, I recall, quite a torment to breathe. But I had to, of course.

Nor did I lose control of myself in spite of the agony, both mental and physical, that I was suffering. I didn't lose control till they began to mock me. Yes, they did, I assure you of that. I heard his voice quite clearly, and honesty compels me to admit that it was singularly sweet and the tune was the most haunting I have ever heard. They were about forty yards away, two seals swimming together, and the evening light was so clear and taut that his voice might have been the vibration of an invisible bow across its coloured bands. He was singing the song that Elizabeth and I had discovered in an album of Scottish music in the little fishing-hotel where we had been living:

I am a Man upon the land,
I am a Selkie in the sea,
And when I'm far from any strand
I am at home on Sule Skerry!

But his purpose, you see, was mockery. They were happy, together in the vast simplicity of the ocean, and I, abandoned to the terror of life alone, life among human beings, was lost and full of panic. It was then I began to scream. I could hear myself screaming, it was quite horrible. But I couldn't stop. I had to go on screaming.

One of the most beautiful records that even John McCormack ever made is the Song to the Seals, *a haunting arrangement by Granville Bantock of a spell* (Oiran, oiran, oiran, airoo . . .) *by which the men of the Hebrides communicate with their neighbors the seals. The record is still in print (Irish Gramaphone IR326), and we suggest you order it now as the perfect accompaniment to your eventual rereading of this equally haunting story.*

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We are unquestionably on the verge of the exploration of space — which means that man is about to face a completely new psychological and physiological environment. "Astronomy and astrophysics," as Dr. Heinz Haber of Randolph Field writes in SPACE MEDICINE, *"which were hitherto the prime examples of learning for its own sake, are about to become an applied science of immediate importance and urgent necessity." And our most advanced scientific thinking on the subject is bound to be mere guesswork; as Dr. Haber admits, "at present we can only attempt to derive the objective and subjective phenomena" of space flight. You'll recall the sensational science-fictional speculations concerning the doom of men who passed the sonic barrier; men passed that barrier . . . only to discover that nothing at all happened. But we still can, and indeed must, speculate upon the consequences of flight into space itself; and in this brief and telling episode, Alfred Coppel offers, in our opinion, one of the most cogently plausible hypotheses yet advanced.*

The Dreamer

by ALFRED COPPEL

THE rockets, two of them, stood a half-mile apart. They were tall and sleek under the brassy desert sky. Denby, bulky in his pressure-suit, stood for a long moment just looking at them. His heart was singing. *This*, he thought, *is what I was born for.* He let his imagination run free and he was already in space, drinking in the glories of creation. *The sun and the stars shone together in the violet darkness; the earth was a green mistiness below. . . .*

Feldman touched his arm. "Ready?"

Denby returned to reality and nodded. He and Feldman and the little group of technicians moved off across the desert toward the rocket.

The interior of the projectile was a cool cave. Denby let himself be strapped into the acceleration harness. He pulled off a gauntlet, baring his arm for Feldman's needle.

The psychologist prepared the syringe in silence. Presently he turned and looked down at Denby. "All right, now," he said quietly. The needle bit deep. "This will let you rest during the worst part."

The technicians completed their adjustments. One by one they wished Denby luck and filed out into the blazing daylight.

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"You're quite sure about this?" Feldman asked. "You really want to go?"

Great God! thought Denby, *he asks me if I want to go! All my life has been a prelude to this moment. I've dreamed of it, lived for it ever since I can remember, and Feldman asks if I want to go!*

"Yes," Denby said, "I want to go. I've earned the right, haven't I?"

The psychologist smiled faintly. "You've earned the right. No one questions that. But think a minute, boy. All your life you've been chasing a rainbow. Now you think you've caught up with it. You spent your years in dreaming that one day you would be the first man to circle the Moon, but —"

"Listen, Feldman," Denby said in a tight voice, "I've worked for this. Ever since I can remember. Even when I was a child, I was laughed at and put apart because of this. I was *different*. I was alone always, and the dream was my only companion. I read and thought and wondered and wanted. Now I'm having my chance to make it mean something. Can you ask me if I want it and expect your question to make any sense? Why don't you ask me if I want to breathe?"

Feldman glanced at his watch. "You still have time to change your mind, you know. There's an alternate pilot ready."

Denby turned his face away. The sedative was beginning to make him drowsy and cross. He wished this damned witch doctor would get out and leave him alone.

"You lived with a fantasy," Feldman pursued, "and because of it, you were lonely — always. Isn't that so?"

Denby did not reply. Feldman had dug deep. Loneliness. He knew that feeling well. Something like a chill swept over him. Tiny shards of memory cut him. He had been lonely. His dream — and his roving mind — had set him apart and so he had turned inward, toward the dream, for companionship. But still the world had penetrated to hurt him. He remembered his mother asking: *Why do you read so much? And such trash! Why don't you go out and play with the other boys?* Could he have told her that he lived only to dream that he might one day stand on the soil of an alien world and see the earth in the sky? At twelve? She'd have laughed at him. And then his father: *Will we ever go to the Moon, Daddy? Don't ask such silly questions, boy. . . .*

"You think this is the answer," Feldman's voice went on and on, like the blurry drone of bees on a summer day. "But aren't you plunging deeper into the very thing that you hated so as a child? That sense of being *apart?* Doesn't that make you afraid, Denby?"

Why does he keep prodding me? Denby thought peevishly. "Shut up

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and get out of here," he muttered at Feldman. *Leave me alone leave me alone alone alone*, his thoughts said. He shuddered, sending a tremor through the taut harness in which he lay.

"All right, boy. I'm sorry." Feldman patted him clumsily on the shoulder. He took the plexiglas helmet from its rack and lowered it gently over Denby's head. "I didn't mean to upset you," he said. "It's just that we have to be *sure*. . . ." He stepped to the valve and looked back. "I'm sorry, Denby," he said again. And then he was gone.

Denby lay in a half-stupor, waiting for the first thrust of the rockets. Presently it came — a muted thunder that set the tiny dark cave thrumming. He felt the harness give under the increasing pressure. There was pain in the vise-like grip of the g-suit as it banged hard against his flesh.

And then there was darkness. Darkness shot with tiny spirals of light — nebulae that whirled close by in his own private little universe.

He awoke in darkness, his heart pounding. It was done! The dream was reality. Moving heavily under the constant thrust of the rockets, he arose from his harness and activated the first telescreen. He cried out at what he saw.

The sun and the stars shone together in a black sky, but a sky infinitely vaster and colder than the sky of his dream. There was a sense of immensity, of great open reaches of darkness that seemed to clutch unremittingly at his throat.

Memories flooded back again. *Daddy, will we ever reach the Moon? Don't be silly, boy!* He remembered the bitterness of the memories, but realized with a flash of panic that he was clinging to them. They were ties that held him in place in this shocking expanse of hideous emptiness. Human memories — memories of earth.

One by one he activated the other telescreens, until at last he was surrounded by the brittle starkness of space. The stars were far away and icy, the sun was distant, too. Harsh with an unreal brilliance that hurt his eyes. Denby felt suddenly as though he were falling, tumbling endlessly through that ghastly dark infinity. He sprawled to the padded deck and clung there, the breath rasping in his throat. He felt — alone.

And then he saw the earth. It was a greenish, cloud-flecked ball, unreal, alien. He felt the beginnings of sheer panic, a mindless, throbbing terror. *This wasn't like the dream*, he thought wildly. In the dream he hadn't been afraid. In the dream there had been exaltation and pride. There hadn't been these vast emptinesses, and the hideous, mind-cracking — *loneliness!*

Denby screamed. The sound echoed hollowly in the confines of his helmet and added to his terror. He screamed again and again. . . .

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He was still screaming when the valve opened and the psychs laid their hands on him and led him out into the desert sunshine.

"I tried to warn you," Feldman said gently. "But as you said, you had earned the right to try."

The voice that came from the figure on the hospital bed was small, crushed. "It was all faked — all of it. A trick. . . ."

Feldman shook his head. "Not really. The screens were fed pictures taken from V-2s by WAC-Corporals. The gravity effects were duplicated by centrifugal action. The whole set-up is only a synthetic training device to weed out the obviously unsuitables."

Bitterly, "Like me."

"I'm afraid so, my boy. You see, spaceflight is not for the lonely. It's not for the brilliant, the sensitive, or the imaginative. Such minds can't stand it. No," Feldman said, rising, "the stars belong to the clods, the dull ones. They can face real loneliness. For them it has no meaning and therefore no terrors."

He could hear Denby's smothered sobs. He stood at the door for a long while, watching the broken, solitary figure on the white bed. He shook his head sadly. "The dream," he said, "is not for the dreamers. . . ."

Note:

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In writing this introduction we for once abandon the formal (and for us quite accurate) editorial "we" and I take it from here. For I bought this story on its own merits and, for better or worse, suggested a few editorial changes which the author dutifully made. Anthony Boucher is a writer, critic, editor and co-editor. He is also a nut on opera. Stacked in his living-room are between four and five thousand operatic recordings, ranging from an 1895 Adelina Patti to a 1951 Ezio Pinza. All too often, when we should have been working on this magazine, he has beguiled me into listening to choice selections of these, accompanied by the most fascinating, most intelligent, least patronising commentary on things musical I have ever heard. So, herewith a story on recordings; a story that can either be straight fantasy (and uniquely horrifying such!), or straight detective problem (still horrifying!). Alternate solutions are offered. Frankly, I think it's fantasy; I just don't see any other way out. If you like this story and its Dr. Verner, let me know; Boucher promises a series . . . you and time willing. If you don't like it, well, I am the editor in this case. — J. F. McC.

The Anomaly of the Empty Man

by ANTHONY BOUCHER

"THIS is for you," Inspector Abrahams announced wryly. "Another screwy one."

I was late and out of breath. I'd somehow got entangled with the Downtown Merchants' Association annual parade, and for a while it looked like I'd be spending the day surrounded by gigantic balloon-parodies of humanity. But it takes more than rubber Gullivers to hold me up when Inspector Abrahams announces that he's got a case of the kind he labels "for Lamb."

Abrahams didn't add any explanation. He just opened the door of the apartment. I went in ahead of him. It was a place I could have liked if it hadn't been for what was on the floor.

Two walls were mostly windows. One gave a good view of the Golden Gate. From the other, on a fine day, you could see the Farallones, and it was a fine day.

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The other two walls were records and a record player. I'd heard of the Stambaugh collection of early operatic recordings. If I'd been there on any other errand, my mouth would have watered at the prospect of listening to lost great voices.

"If you can get a story out of this that makes sense," the Inspector grunted, "you're welcome to it — at the usual fee." Which was a dinner at Lupo's Pizzeria. "Everything's just the way we found it."

I looked at the unfinished highball, now almost colorless with all its ice melted and its soda flat. I looked at the cylindrical ash of the cigaret which had burned itself out. I looked at the vacuum cleaner — a shockingly utilitarian object in this set for gracious living. I looked at the record player, still switched on, still making its methodical seventy-eight revolutions per minute, though there was no record on the turntable.

Then I managed to look again at the thing on the floor.

It was worse than a body. It was like a tasteless bloodless parody of the usual occupant of the spot marked X. Clothes scattered in disorder seem normal — even more normal, perhaps, in a bachelor apartment than clothes properly hung in closets. But this . . .

Above the neck of the dressing gown lay the spectacles. The sleeves of the shirt were inside the sleeves of the dressing gown. The shirt was buttoned, even to the collar, and the foulard tie was knotted tight up against the collar button. The tails of the shirt were tucked properly into the zipped-up, properly belted trousers. Below the trouser cuffs lay the shoes, at a lifelike angle, with the tops of the socks emerging from them.

"And there's an undershirt under the shirt," Inspector Abrahams muttered disconsolately, "and shorts inside the pants. Complete outfit: what the well-dressed man will wear. Only no man in them."

It was as though James Stambaugh had been attacked by some solvent which eats away only flesh and leaves all the inanimate articles. Or as though some hyperspatial suction had drawn the living man out of his wardrobe, leaving his sartorial shell behind him.

I said, "Can I dirty an ashtray in this scene?"

Abrahams nodded. "I was just keeping it for you to see. We've got our pictures." While I lit up, he crossed to the record player and switched it off. "Damned whirligig gets on my nerves."

"Whole damned setup gets on mine," I said. "It's like a strip-tease version of the *Mary Celeste*. Only the strip wasn't a gradual tease; just abruptly, *whoosh!*, a man's gone. One minute he's comfortably dressed in his apartment, smoking, drinking, playing records. The next he's stark naked — and where and doing what?"

Abrahams pulled at his nose, which didn't need lengthening. "We had

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the Japanese valet check the wardrobe. Every article of clothing James Stambaugh owned is still here in the apartment."

"Who found him?" I asked.

"Kaguchi. The valet. He had last night off. He let himself in this morning, to prepare coffee and prairie oysters as usual. He found this."

"Blood?" I ventured.

Abrahams shook his head.

"Visitors?"

"Ten apartments in this building. Three of them had parties last night. You can figure how much help the elevator man was?"

"The drink?"

"We took a sample to the lab. Nothing but the best scotch."

I frowned at the vacuum cleaner. "What's that doing out here? It ought to live in a closet."

"Puzzled Kaguchi too. He even says it was still a little warm when he found it, like it had been used. But we looked in the bag. I assure you Stambaugh didn't get sucked in there."

"Motive?"

"Gay dog, our Mr. Stambaugh. Maybe you read Herb Caen's gossip column too? And Kaguchi gave us a little fill-in. Brothers, fathers, husbands . . . Too many motives."

"But why this way?" I brooded. "Get rid of him, sure. But why leave this hollow husk . . .?"

"Not just why, Lamb. How."

"How? That should be easy enough to —"

"Try it. Try fitting sleeves into sleeves, pants into pants, so they're as smooth and even as if they were still on the body. I've tried, with the rest of the wardrobe. It doesn't work."

I had an idea. "You don't fit 'em in," I said smugly. "You take 'em off. Look." I unbuttoned my coat and shirt, undid my tie, and pulled everything off at once. "See," I said; "sleeves in sleeves." I unzipped and stepped out of trousers and shorts. "See; pants in pants."

Inspector Abrahams was whistling the refrain of *Strip Polka*. "You missed your career, Lamb," he said. "Only now you've got to put your shirt tails between the outer pants and the inner ones and still keep everything smooth. And look in here." He lifted up one shoe and took out a pocket flash and shot a beam inside. "The sock's caught on a little snag in one of the metal eyelets. That's kept it from collapsing, and you can still see the faint impress of toes in there. Try slipping your foot out of a laced-up shoe and see if you can get that result."

I was getting dressed again and feeling like a damned fool.

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"Got any other inspirations?" Abrahams grinned.

"The only inspiration I've got is as to where to go now."

"Some day," the Inspector grunted, "I'll learn where you go for your extra-bright ideas."

"As the old lady said to the elephant keeper," I muttered, "you wouldn't believe me if I told you."

Things were relatively quiet today in Dr. Verner's studio. Slavko Catenich was still hammering away at his block of marble, apparently on the theory that the natural form inherent in the stone would emerge if you hit it often enough. Irma Borigian was running over vocal exercises and occasionally checking herself by striking a note on the piano, which seemed to bring her more reassurance than it did me. Those two, plus a couple of lads industriously fencing whom I'd never seen before, were the only members of Verner's Varieties on hand today.

Irma ah-ah-ahed and pinked, the fencers clicked, Slavko crashed, and in the midst of the decibels the Old Man stood at his five-foot lectern-desk, resolutely proceeding in quill-pen longhand with the resounding periods of *The Anatomy of Nonscience*, that never-concluded compendium of curiosities which was half Robert Burton and half Charles Fort.

He gave me the medium look. Not the hasty "Just this sentence" or the forbidding "Dear boy, this page *must* be finished"; but the in-between "One more deathless paragraph" look. I grabbed a chair and tried to watch Irma's singing and listen to Slavko's sculpting.

There's no describing Dr. Verner. You can say his age is somewhere between seventy and a hundred. You can say he has a mane of hair like an albino lion and a little goatee like a Kentucky Colonel who never heard of cigars. ("When a man's hair is white," I've heard him say, "tobacco and a beard are mutually exclusive vices.") You can mention the towering figure and the un-English mobility of the white old hands and the disconcerting twinkle of those impossibly blue eyes. And you'd still have about as satisfactory a description as when you say the Taj Mahal is a domed, square, white marble building.

The twinkle was in the eyes and the mobility was in the hands when he finally came to tower over me. They were both gone by the time I'd finished the story of the Stambaugh apartment and the empty man. He stood for a moment frowning, the eyes lusterless, the hands limp at his sides. Then, still standing like that, he relaxed the frown and opened his mouth in a resonant bellow.

"You sticks!" he roared. (Irma stopped and looked hurt.) "You stones!" (The fencers stopped and looked expectant.) "You worse than worst of

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those that lawless and uncertain thoughts" (Slavko stopped and looked resigned.) "imagine howling," Dr. Verner concluded in a columbine coo, having shifted in mid-quotation from one Shakespearean play to another so deftly that I was still looking for the joint.

Verner's Varieties waited for the next number on the bill. In majestic silence Dr. Verner stalked to his record player. Stambaugh's had been a fancy enough custom-made job, but nothing like this.

If you think things are confusing now, with records revolving at 78, 45, and 33⅓ rpm, you should see the records of the early part of the century. There were cylinders, of course (Verner had a separate machine for them). Disc records, instead of our present standard sizes, ranged anywhere from 7 to 14 inches in diameter, with curious fractional stops in between. Even the center holes came in assorted sizes. Many discs were lateral-cut, like modern ones; but quite a few were hill-and-dale, with the needle riding up and down instead of sideways — which actually gave better reproduction but somehow never became overwhelmingly popular. The grooving varied too, so that even if two companies both used hill-and-dale cutting you couldn't play the records of one on a machine for the other. And just to make things trickier, some records started from the inside instead of the outer edge. It was Free Enterprise gone hogwild.

Dr. Verner had explained all this while demonstrating to me how his player could cope with any disc record ever manufactured. And I had heard him play everything on it from smuggled dubbings of Crosby blow-ups to a recording by the original *Floradora Sextet* — which was, he was always careful to point out, a double sextet or, as he preferred, a duodecimet.

"You are," he announced ponderously, "about to hear the greatest dramatic soprano of this century. Rosa Ponselle and Elisabeth Rethberg were passable. There was something to be said for Lillian Nordica and Lena Geyer. But listen!" And he slid the needle into the first groove.

"Dr. Verner —" I started to ask for footnotes; I should have known better.

"Dear boy . . . !" he murmured protestingly, over the preliminary surface noise of the aged pressing, and gave me one of those twinkles of bluest blue which implied that surely only a moron could fail to follow the logic of the procedure.

I sat back and listened. Irma listened too, but the eyes of the others were soon longingly intent on foils and chisel. I listened casually at first, then began to sit forward.

I have heard, in person or on records, all of the venerable names which Dr. Verner mentioned — to say nothing of Tebaldi, Russ, Ritter-Ciampi,

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Souez and both Lehmanns. And reluctantly I began to admit that he was right; this was *the* dramatic soprano. The music was strange to me — a setting of the Latin text of the *Our Father*, surely eighteenth century and at a guess by Pergolesi; it had his irrelevant but reverent tunefulness in approaching a sacred text. Its grave sustained lilt was admirable for showing off a voice; and the voice, unwavering in its prolonged tones, incredible in its breath control, deserved all the showing off it could get. During one long phrase of runs, as taxing as anything in Mozart or Handel, I noticed Irma. She was holding her breath in sympathy with the singer, and the singer won. Irma had let out an admiring gasp before the soprano had, still on one breath, achieved the phrase.

And then, for reasons more operatic than liturgical, the music quickened. The sustained legato phrases gave way to cascades of light bright coloratura. Notes sparkled and dazzled and brightness fell from the air. It was impeccable, inapproachable — infinitely discouraging to a singer and almost shocking to the ordinary listener.

The record ended. Dr. Verner beamed around the room as if he'd done all that himself. Irma crossed to the piano, struck one key to verify the incredible note in alt upon which the singer had ended, picked up her music, and wordlessly left the room.

Slavko had seized his chisel and the fencers were picking up their foils as I approached our host. "But Dr. Verner," I led with my chin. "The Stambaugh case . . ."

"Dear boy," he sighed as he readied the old one-two, "you mean you don't realize that you have just heard the solution?"

"You will have a drop of Drambuie, of course?" Dr. Verner queried formally as we settled down in his more nearly quiet inner room.

"Of course," I said. Then as his mouth opened, " 'For without Drambuie,' " I quoted, " 'the world might never have known the simple solution to the problem of the mislaid labyrinth.' "

He spilled a drop. "I was about to mention that very fact. How . . . ? Or perhaps I have alluded to it before in this connection?"

"You have," I said.

"Forgive me." He twinkled disarmingly. "I grow old, dear boy."

Ritualistically we took our first sip of Drambuie. Then:

"I well remember," Dr. Verner began, "that it was in the autumn of the year 1901 . . .

. . . that the horror began. I was by then well established in my Kensington practice, which seemed to flourish as it never had under the ministra-

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tions of its previous possessor, and in a more than comfortable financial position. I was able at last to look about me, to contemplate and to investigate the manifold pleasures which a metropolis at once so cosmopolitan and so insular as London proffers to the unattached young man. The humours of the Music Halls, the delights of a hot bird and a cold bottle shared with a dancer from Daly's, the simpler and less expensive delights of punting on the Thames (shared, I may add, with a simpler and less expensive companion) — these claimed what portion of my time I could salvage from my practise.

But above all I was devoted to music; and to be devoted to music meant, in the London of 1901, to be devoted to — but I have always carefully refrained from the employment of veritable and verifiable names in these narratives. Let me once more be discreet, and call her simply by that affectionate agnomen by which my cousin, to his sorrow, knew her: *Carina*.

I need not describe Carina as a musician; you have just heard her sing Pergolesi, you know how she combined nobility and grandeur with a technical agility which these degenerate days associate only with a certain type of light soprano. But I must seek to describe her as a woman, if woman she may be called.

When first I heard the tittle-tattle of London, I paid it small heed. To the man in the street (or even in the stalls) *actress* is still a euphemism for a harsher and shorter term, though my experience of actresses, extending as it has over three continents and more than my allotted three score and ten of years, tends to lead me, if anywhere, to an opposite conclusion.

The individual who stands out from the herd is the natural target of calumny. I shall never forget the disgraceful episode of the purloined litter, in which the veterinarian Dr. Stookes accused me of — but let us reserve that anomaly for another occasion. To return to Carina: I heard the gossip; I attributed it to as simple a source as I have indicated. But then the evidence began to attain proportions which the most latitudinarian could hardly disregard.

First young Ronny Furbish-Darnley blew out his brains. He had gambling debts, to be sure, and his family chose to lay the stress upon them; but his relations with Carina had been common knowledge. Then Major MacIvers hanged himself with his own cravat (the MacIvers tartan, of course). I need hardly add that a MacIvers had no gambling debts. Even that episode might have been hushed up had not a peer of so exalted a name that I dare not even paraphrase it perished in the flames of his ancestral castle. Even in the charred state in which they were recovered, the bodies of his wife and seven children clearly evinced the clumsy haste with which he had slit their throats.

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It was as though . . . how shall I put it? . . . as though Carina were in some way a "carrier" of what we had then not yet learned to call The Death Wish. Men who knew her too well hungered no longer for life.

The press began to concern itself, as best it might with due regard for the laws of libel, with this situation. Leading articles hinted at possible governmental intervention to preserve the flower of England from this insidious foreigner. Little else was discussed in Hyde Park save the elimination of Carina.

Even the memorable mass suicides at Oxford had provided no sensation comparable to this. Carina's very existence seemed as much in danger as though Jack the Ripper had been found and turned over to the English people. We are firm believers in our English justice; but when that justice is powerless to act, the Englishman aroused is a phenomenon to fear.

If I may be pardoned a Hibernian lapse, the only thing that saved Carina's life was . . . her death.

It was a natural death — perhaps the first natural action of her life. She collapsed on the stage of Covent Garden during a performance of Mozart's *Così fan tutte*, just after having delivered the greatest performance of that fantastic aria, *Come scoglio*, that a living ear has heard.

There were investigations of the death. Even my cousin, with an understandable personal interest, took a hand. (He was the only one of Carina's close admirers to survive her infection; I have often wondered whether this fact resulted from an incredible strength or an equally incredible inadequacy within him.) But there was no possible doubt that the death was a natural one.

It was after the death that the Carina legend began to grow. It was then that young men about town who had seen the great Carina but once began to mention the unmentionable reasons which had caused them to refrain from seeing her again. It was then that her dresser, a crone whose rationality was as uncertain as her still persistent terror was unquestionable, began to speak of unspeakable practises, to hint at black magic as among milady's avocations, to suggest that her utterance (which you have heard) of flights of notes, incredibly rapid yet distinct, owed its facility to her control and even suspension of the mortal limitations of time.

And then began . . . the horror. Perhaps you thought that by *the horror* I meant the sequence of Carina-carried suicides? No; even that lay still, if near the frontier, within the uttermost bounds of human comprehension.

The horror passed those bounds.

I need not ask you to envision it. You have beheld it. You have seen clothing sucked dry of its fleshly tenant, you have seen the haberdashers'

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habitation sink flabbily in upon itself, no longer sustained by tissue of bone and blood and nerves.

All London saw it that year. And London could not believe.

First it was that eminent musicologist, Sir Frederick Paynter, F.R.C.M. Then there were two young aristocrats, then, oddly, a poor Jewish peddler in the East End.

I shall spare you the full and terrible details, alluding only in passing to the Bishop of Cloisterham. I had read the press accounts. I had filed the cuttings for their very impossibility (for even then I had had adumbrations of the concept which you now know as *The Anatomy of Nonscience*).

But the horror did not impinge upon me closely until it struck one of my own patients, a retired naval officer by the name of Clutsam. His family had sent for me at once, at the same time that they had dispatched a messenger to fetch my cousin.

As you know, my cousin enjoyed a certain fame as a private detective. He had been consulted in more than one previous instance of the horror; but I had read little of him in the press save a reiteration of his hope that the solution lay in his familiar dictum: "Discard the impossible; and whatever remains, no matter how improbable, must be true."

I had already formulated my now celebrated counter-dictum: "Discard the impossible; then if *nothing* remains, some part of the 'impossible' must be possible." It was thus that our dicta and ourselves faced each other across the worn and outdated naval uniform on the floor, complete from the gold braid on its shoulders to the wooden peg below the empty left trouser leg, cut off at the knee.

"I imagine, Horace," my cousin remarked, puffing at his blackened clay, "that you conceive this to be your sort of affair."

"It is obviously not yours," I stated. "There is something in these evanishings beyond —"

"— beyond the humdrum imagination of a professional detective? Horace, you are a man of singular accomplishments."

I smiled. My cousin, as my great-uncle Etienne used to remark of General Masséna, was famous for the accuracy of his information.

"I will confess," he added, "since my Boswell is not within earshot; that you have occasionally hit upon what satisfies you, at least, as the truth in some few cases in which I have failed. Do *you* see any element linking Captain Clutsam, Sir Frederick Paynter, Moishe Lipkowitz and the Bishop of Cloisterham?"

"I do not." It was always discreet to give my cousin the answer which he expected.

"And *I do!* And yet I am no nearer a solution than . . ." His pipe

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clenched in his teeth, he flung himself about the room, as though pure physical action would somehow ameliorate the lamentable state of his nerves. Finally he paused before me, looked sharply into my eyes and said, "Very well. I shall tell you. What is nonsense in the patterns shaped by the reasoning mind may well serve you as foundation for some new structure of unreason.

"I have traced every fact in the lives of these men. I know what they habitually ate for breakfast, how they spent their Sundays, and which of them preferred snuff to tobacco. There is only *one* factor which they all possess in common: Each of them recently purchased a record of the Pergolesi *Pater Noster* sung by . . . *Carina.* And those records have vanished as thoroughly as the naked men themselves."

I bestowed upon him an amicable smile. Family affection must temper the ungentlemanly emotion of triumph. Still smiling, I left him with the uniform and the leg while I betook myself to the nearest gramophone merchant.

The solution was by then obvious to me. I had observed that Captain Clutsam's gramophone was of the sapphire-needled type designed to play those recordings known as hill-and-dale, the vertical recordings produced by Pathe and other companies as distinguished from the lateral recordings of Columbia and Gramophone-and-Typewriter. And I had recalled that many hill-and-dale recordings were at that time designed (as I believe some wireless transcriptions are now) for an inside start; that is, so that the needle began near the label and traveled outward to the rim of the disc. An unthinking listener might easily begin to play an inside-start record in the more normal manner. The result, in almost all instances, would be gibberish; but in this particular case . . .

I purchased the Carina record with no difficulty. I hastened to my Kensington home, where the room over the dispensary contained a gramophone convertible to either lateral or vertical recordings. I placed the record on the turntable. It was, to be sure, labeled INSIDE START; but how easily one might overlook such a notice! I overlooked it deliberately. I started the turntable and lowered the needle. . . .

The cadenzas of coloratura are strange things in reverse. As I heard it, the record naturally began with the startling final note which so disheartened Miss Borigian, then went on to those dazzling *fioriture* which so strengthen the dresser's charge of time-magic. But in reverse, these seemed like the music of some undiscovered planet, coherent to themselves, following a logic unknown to us and shaping a beauty which only our ignorance prevents us from worshiping.

And there were words to these flourishes; for almost unique among

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sopranos, Carina possessed a diction of diabolical clarity. And the words were at first simply *Nema . . . nema . . . nema . . .*

It was while the voice was brilliantly repeating this reversed *Amen* that I became *literally* beside myself.

I was standing, naked and chill in the London evening, beside a meticulously composed agglomeration of clothing which parodied the body of Dr. Horace Verner.

This fragment of clarity lasted only an instant. Then the voice reached the significant words: *olam a son arebil des men . . .*

This was the Lord's Prayer which she was singing. It is common knowledge that there is in all necromancy no charm more potent than that prayer (and most especially in Latin) *said backwards.* As the last act of her magical malefactions, Carina had left behind her this record, knowing that one of its purchasers would occasionally, by inadvertence, play it backwards, and that then the spell would take effect. It had taken effect now.

I was in space . . . a space of infinite darkness and moist warmth. The music had departed elsewhere. I was alone in this space and the space itself was alive and by its very moist warm dark life this space was draining from me all that which was my own life. And then there was with me a voice in that space, a voice that cried ever *Eem vull! Eem vull!* and for all the moaning gasping urgency in that voice I knew it for the voice of Carina.

I was a young man then. The Bishop's end must have been swift and merciful. But even I, young and strong, knew that this space desired the final sapping of my life, that my life should be drawn from my body even as my body had been drawn from its shell. So I prayed.

I was not a man given to prayer in those days. But I knew words which the Church has taught us are pleasing to God, and I prayed with all the fervor of my being for deliverance from this Nightmare Life-in-Death.

And I stood again naked beside my clothes. I looked at the turntable of the gramophone. The disc was not there. Still naked, I walked to the dispensary and mixed myself a sedative before I dared trust my fingers to button my garments. Then I dressed and went out again to the shop of the gramophone merchant. There I bought every copy in his stock of that devil's *Pater Noster* and smashed them all before his eyes.

Ill though I could afford it, even in my relative affluence, I spent the next few weeks in combing London for copies of that recording. One copy, and one only, I preserved; you heard it just now. I had hoped that no more existed . . .

. . . but obviously," Dr. Verner concluded, "your Mr. Stambaugh managed to acquire one, God rest his soul . . . and body."

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I drained my second Drambuie and said, "I'm a great admirer of your cousin." Dr. Verner looked at me with polite blue inquiry. "You find what satisfies *you* as the truth."

"Occam's Razor, dear boy," Dr. Verner murmured, associatively stroking his smooth cheeks. "The solution accounts economically for every integral fact in the problem."

"But look," I said suddenly. "It doesn't! For once I've got you cold. There's one 'integral fact' completely omitted."

"Which is . . . ?" Dr. Verner cooed.

"You can't have been the first man that thought of praying in that . . . that space. Certainly the Bishop must have."

For a moment Dr. Horace Verner was silent. Then he fixed me with the Dear-boy-how-idiotic! twinkle. "But only I," he announced tranquilly, "had realized that in that . . . space all sound, like the Our Father itself, was reversed. The voice cried ever *Eem vull!* and what is that phonetically but *Love me!* backwards? Only *my* prayer was effective, because only I had the foresight to pray *in reverse phonetics.*"

I phoned Abrahams to say I had an idea and could I do some checking in the Stambaugh apartment?

"Good," he said. "I have an idea too. Meet you there in a half hour."

There was no Abrahams in the corridor when I got there; but the police seal was broken and the door was ajar. I went on in and stopped dead.

For the first moment I thought it was still Stambaugh's clothes spread out there. But there was no mistaking Inspector Abraham's neat gray plainclothes — with no Abrahams in them.

I think I said something about *the horror.* I draw pretty much of a blank between seeing that empty suit and looking up to the far doorway and seeing Inspector Abrahams.

He was wearing a dressing gown of Stambaugh's, which was far too short for him. I stared at his grotesque figure and at the android parody which dangled from his hand.

"Sorry, Lamb," he grinned. "Couldn't resist the theatrical effect. Go on. Take a good look at the empty man on the floor."

I looked. The clothes were put together with the exactly real, body-fitting, sucked-out effect which we had already decided was impossible.

"You see," Abrahams said, "I remembered the vacuum cleaner. And the Downtown Merchants' parade."

I was back at the studio early the next morning. There was nobody from Verner's Varieties there but Slavko, and it was so relatively quiet that

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Dr. Verner was just staring at the manuscript of *The Anatomy* without adding a word.

"Look," I said. "In the first place, Stambaugh's record-player isn't equipped for hill-and-dale records."

"They *can* be played even on an ordinary machine," Dr. Verner observed tranquilly. "The effect is curious — faint and with an odd echoing overlap, which might even enhance the power of the cantrip."

"And I looked in his card catalog," I went on, "and he didn't have a recording of the Pergolesi *Pater Noster* by anybody."

Dr. Verner widened his overblue eyes. "But of course the card would vanish with the record," he protested. "Magic makes allowances for modern developments."

"And besides," I insisted, "Abrahams has demonstrated how it was really done. The vacuum cleaner tipped him off. Stambaugh had bought a man-sized, man-shaped balloon, a little brother of those monster figures they use in parades. He inflated it and dressed it in his clothes. Then he deflated it, leaving the clothes in perfect arrangement with nothing in them but a shrunken chunk of rubber, which he could withdraw by unbuttoning the shirt. Abrahams found the only firm in San Francisco that manufactures such balloons. A clerk identified Stambaugh as a purchaser. So Abrahams bought a duplicate and pulled the same gag on me."

Dr. Verner frowned. "And the vacuum cleaner?"

"You use a vacuum cleaner in reverse for pumping up large balloons. And you use it normally for deflating them; if you just let the air out *whoosh!* they're apt to break."

"The clerk" (it came out *clark*, of course) "identified Stambaugh positively?"

I shifted under the piercing blueness. "Well, you know identifications from photographs . . ."

"Indeed I do." He took a deliberately timed pause. "And the record-player? Why was its turntable still revolving?"

"Accident, I guess. Stambaugh must've bumped against the switch."

"Which projected from the cabinet so that one might well engage it by accident?"

I pictured the machine. I visualized the switch and the depth to which one would have to reach in. "Well, no," I granted. "Not exactly . . ."

Dr. Verner smiled down at me tolerantly. "And the motive for these elaborate maneuvers by Mr. Stambaugh?"

"Too many threatening male relatives on his tail. He deliberately staged this to look oh-so-mysterious so nobody'd spot the simple fact that he was just getting the hell out from under. Abrahams has an all-

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points alarm out; he'll be picked up any time within the next few days."

Dr. Verner sighed. His hands flickered through the air in a gesture of infinitely resigned patience. He moved to his record cabinet, took out a disc, placed it on the turntable, and adjusted certain switches.

"Come, Slavko!" he announced loudly. "Since Mr. Lamb prefers rubber balloons to truth, we are conferring a signal privilege upon him. We are retiring to the other room, leaving him here alone with the Carina record. His cocksure materialism will surely wish to verify the effect of playing it in reverse."

Slavko stopped pounding and said, "Huh?"

"Come, Slavko. But first say a polite goodbye to Mr. Lamb. You may not be seeing him again." Dr. Verner paused in the doorway and surveyed me with what seemed like genuine concern. "Dear boy," he murmured, "you won't forget that point about the reverse phonetics . . . ?"

He was gone and so (without more polite goodbye than a grunt) was Slavko. I was alone with Carina, with the opportunity to disprove Dr. Verner's fabulous narrative once and for all.

His story had made no pretense of explaining the presence of the vacuum cleaner.

And Inspector Abrahams' theory had not even attempted to account for the still-revolving turntable.

I switched on the turntable of the Verner machine. Carefully I lowered the tone-arm, let the oddly rounded needle settle into the first groove from the outer rim.

I heard that stunning final note in alt. So flawless was the Carina diction that I could hear, even in that range, the syllable to which it was sung: *nem*, the beginning of the reverse-Latin *Amen*.

Then I heard a distorted groan as the turntable abruptly slowed down from 78 to zero revolutions per minute. I looked at the switch; it was still on. I turned and saw Dr. Verner towering behind me, with a disconnected electric plug dangling from his hand.

"No," he said softly — and there was a dignity and power in that softness that I had never heard in his most impressive bellows. "No, Mr. Lamb. You have a wife and two sons. I have no right to trifle with their lives merely to gratify an old man's resentment of scepticism."

Quietly he lifted the tone-arm, removed the record, restored it to its envelope, and refiled it. His deft, un-English hands were not at their steadiest.

"When Inspector Abrahams succeeds in tracing down Mr. Stambaugh," he said firmly, "you shall hear this record in reverse. And not before then."

And it just so happens they haven't turned up Stambaugh yet.

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Elizabeth Bowen is unquestionably one of the foremost figures today in English letters: a novelist and short story writer of the first rank, with a consummate technique as subtly sure in its effects as it is impossible to analyze; a popular touring lecturer; and a critic as perceptive as she is prolific. (We especially commend her essay on J. Sheridan Le Fanu introducing the Cresset edition of his UNCLE SILAS.) *One aspect of her versatility is, however, rarely mentioned: the fact that she is a not infrequent creator of highly distinguished fantasy. Any volume of her short stories contains at least one item to delight the connoisseur of imaginative fiction; and in* THE DEMON LOVER AND OTHER STORIES (*London: Cape, 1945*), *she achieved one of the most difficult of all supernatural feats: a truly funny ghost story. Not since the denizens of Richard Middleton's* The Ghost Ship *have we encountered so purely comic a phantasm as the outraged and outrageous cook whom Miss Bowen calls* The Cheery Soul.

The Cheery Soul

by ELIZABETH BOWEN

ON ARRIVING, I first met the aunt of whom they had told me, the aunt who had not yet got over being turned out of Italy. She sat resentfully by the fire, or rather the fireplace, and did not look up when I came in. The acrid smell that curled through the drawing-room could be traced to a grate full of sizzling fir cones that must have been brought in damp. From the mantelpiece one lamp, with its shade tilted, shed light on the parting of the aunt's hair. It could not be said that the room was cheerful: the high, curtained bow windows made draughty caves; the armchairs and sofas, pushed back against the wall, wore the air of being renounced forever. Only a row of discreet greeting-cards along a bureau betrayed the presence of Christmas.

I coughed and said: 'I feel I should introduce myself,' and followed this up by giving the aunt my name, which she received with apathy. When she did stir, it was to look at the parcel that I coquettishly twirled from its loop of string. 'They're not giving presents, this year,' she said in alarm. 'If I were you, I should put that back in my room.'

Copyright, 1941, 1946, by Elizabeth Bowen. From "Ivy Gripped the Steps" (formerly "The Demon Lover"), published by Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1946

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'It's just — my rations.'

'In that case,' she remarked, 'I really don't know what you had better do.' Turning away from me she picked up a small bent poker, and with this began to interfere with the fir cones, of which several, steaming, bounced from the grate. 'A good wood stove,' she said, 'would make all the difference. At Sienna, though they say it is cold in winter, we never had troubles of this kind.'

'How would it be,' I said, 'if I sat down?' I pulled a chair a little on to the hearthrug, if only for the idea of the thing. 'I gather our hosts are out. I wonder where they have gone to?'

'Really, I couldn't tell you.'

'My behaviour,' I said, 'has been shockingly free-and-easy. Having pulled the bell three times, waited, had a go at the knocker . . .'

'. . . I heard,' she said, slightly bowing her head.

'I gave *that* up, tried the door, found it unlocked, so just marched in.'

'Have you come about something?' she said with renewed alarm.

'Well, actually, I fear that I've come to stay. They have been so very kind as to . . .'

'. . . Oh, I remember — someone *was* coming.' She looked at me rather closely. 'Have you been here before?'

'Never. So this is delightful,' I said firmly. 'I am billeted where I work' (I named the industrial town, twelve miles off, that was these days in a ferment of war production), 'my landlady craves my room for these next two days for her daughter, who is on leave, and, on top of this, to be frank, I'm a bit old-fashioned: Christmas alone in a strange town didn't appeal to me. So you can see how I sprang at . . .'

'Yes, I can see,' she said. With the tongs, she replaced the cones that had fallen out of the fire. 'At Orvieto,' she said, 'the stoves were so satisfactory that one felt no ill effects from the tiled floors.'

As I could think of nothing to add to this, I joined her in listening attentively to the hall clock. My entry into the drawing-room having been tentative, I had not made so bold as to close the door behind me, so a further coldness now seeped through from the hall. Except for the clock — whose loud tick was reluctant — there was not another sound to be heard: the very silence seemed to produce echoes. The Rangerton-Karneys' absence from their own house was becoming, virtually, ostentatious. 'I understand,' I said, 'that they are tremendously busy. Practically never not on the go.'

'They expect to have a finger in every pie.'

Their aunt's ingratitude shocked me. She must be (as they had hinted) in a difficult state. They had always spoken with the most marked forbearance of her enforced return to them out of Italy. In England, they said, she

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had no other roof but theirs, and they were constantly wounded (their friends told me) by her saying she would have preferred internment in Italy.

In common with all my fellow-workers at ——, I had a high regard for the Rangerton-Karneys, an admiration tempered, perhaps, with awe. Their energy in the promotion of every war effort was only matched by the austerity of their personal lives. They appeared to have given up almost everything. That they never sat down could be seen from their drawing-room chairs. As 'local people' of the most solid kind they were on terms with the bigwigs of every department, the key minds of our small but now rather important town. Completely discreet, they were palpably 'in the know.'

Their house in the Midlands, in which I now so incredibly found myself, was largish, built of the local stone, *circa* 1860 I should say from its style. It was not very far from a railway junction, and at a still less distance from a canal. I had evaded the strictures on Christmas travel by making the twelve-mile journey by bicycle — indeed, the suggestion that I should do this played a prominent part in their invitation. So I bicycled over. My little things for the two nights were contained in one of those useful American-cloth suitcases, strapped to my back-wheel carrier, while my parcel of rations could be slung, I found, from my handlebar. The bumping of this parcel on my right knee as I pedalled was a major embarrassment. To cap this, the misty damp of the afternoon had caused me to set off in a mackintosh. At the best of times I am not an expert cyclist. The grateful absence of hills (all this country is very flat) was cancelled out by the greasiness of the roads, and army traffic often made me dismount — it is always well to be on the safe side. Now and then, cows or horses loomed up abruptly to peer at me over the reeking hedgerows. The few anonymous villages I passed through all appeared, in the falling dusk, to be very much the same: their inhabitants wore an air of war-time discretion, so I did not dare risk snubs by asking how far I had come. My pocket map, however, proved less unhelpful when I found that I had been reading it upside down. When, about half way, I turned on my lamp, I watched mist curdle under its wobbling ray. My spectacles dimmed steadily; my hands numbed inside my knitted gloves (the only Christmas present I had received so far) and the mist condensed on my muffler in fine drops.

I own that I had sustained myself through this journey on thoughts of the cheery welcome ahead. The Rangerton-Karneys' invitation, delivered by word of mouth only three days ago, had been totally unexpected, as well as gratifying. I had had no reason to think they had taken notice of me. We had met rarely, when I reported to the committees on which they sat. That

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the brother and two sisters (so much alike that people took them for triplets) had attracted *my* wistful notice, I need not say. But not only was my position a quite obscure one; I am not generally sought out; I make few new friends. None of my colleagues had been to the Rangerton-Karneys' house: there was an idea that they had given up guests. As the news of their invitation to me spread (and I cannot say I did much to stop it spreading) I rose rapidly in everyone's estimation.

In fact, their thought had been remarkably kind. Can you wonder that I felt myself favoured? I was soon, now, to see their erstwhile committee faces wreathed with seasonable and genial smiles. I never was one to doubt that people unbend at home. Perhaps a little feverish from my cycling, I pictured blazing hearths through holly-garlanded doors.

Owing to this indulgence in foolish fancy, my real arrival rather deflated me.

'I suppose they went out after tea?' I said to the aunt.

'After lunch, I think,' she replied. 'There was no tea.' She picked up her book, which was about Mantegna, and went on reading, pitched rather tensely forward to catch the light of the dim-bulbed lamp. I hesitated, then rose up, saying that perhaps I had better deliver my rations to the cook. 'If you can,' she said, turning over a page.

The whirr of the clock preparing to strike seven made me jump. The hall had funny acoustics — so much so that I strode across the wide breaches from rug to rug rather than hear my step on the stone flags. Draught and dark coming down a shaft announced the presence of stairs. I saw what little I saw by the flame of a night-light, palpitating under a blue glass inverted shade. The hall and the staircase windows were not blacked out yet. (Back in the drawing-room, I could only imagine, the aunt must have so far bestirred herself as to draw the curtains.)

The kitchen was my objective — as I had said to the aunt. I pushed at a promising baize door: it immediately opened upon a vibration of heat and rich, heartening smells. At these, the complexion of everything changed once more. If my spirits, just lately, had not been very high, this was no doubt due to the fact that I had lunched on a sandwich, then had not dared leave my bicycle to look for a cup of tea. I was in no mood to reproach the Rangerton-Karneys for this Christmas break in their well-known austere routine.

But, in view of this, the kitchen was a surprise. Warm, and spiced with excellent smells, it was in the dark completely but for the crimson glow from between the bars of the range. A good deal puzzled, I switched the light on — the black-out, here, had been punctiliously done.

The glare made me jump. The cook must have found, for her own use, a

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quadruple-power electric bulb. This now fairly blazed down on the vast scrubbed white wood table, scored and scarred by decades of the violent chopping of meat. I looked about — to be staggered by what I did not see. Neither on range, table, nor outsize dresser were there signs of the preparation of any meal. Not a plate, not a spoon, not a canister showed any signs of action. The heat-vibrating top of the range was bare; all the pots and pans were up above, clean and cold, in their places along the rack. I went so far as to open the oven door — a roasting smell came out, but there was nothing inside. A tap drip-drop-dripped on an upturned bowl in the sink — but nobody had been peeling potatoes there.

I put my rations down on the table and was, dumbfounded, preparing to turn away, when a white paper on the white wood caught my eye. This paper, in an inexpert line of block-printing, bore the somewhat unnecessary statement: I AM NOT HERE. To this was added, in brackets: 'Look in the fish kettle.' Though this be no affair of mine, could I fail to follow it up? Was this some new demonstration of haybox cookery; was I to find our dinner snugly concealed? I identified the fish kettle, a large tin object (about the size, I should say, of an infant's bath) that stood on a stool half-way between the sink and range. It wore a tight-fitting lid, which came off with a sort of plop: the sound in itself had an ominous hollowness. Inside, I found, again, only a piece of paper. This said: 'Mr. & the 2 Misses Rangerton-Karney can boil their heads. This holds 3.'

I felt that the least I could do for my hosts the Rangerton-Karneys was to suppress this unkind joke, so badly out of accord with the Christmas spirit. I *could* have dropped the paper straight into the kitchen fire, but on second thought I went back to consult the aunt. I found her so very deep in Mantegna as to be oblivious of the passage of time. She clearly did not like being interrupted. I said: 'Can you tell me if your nephew and nieces had any kind of contretemps with their cook today?'

She replied: 'I make a point of not asking questions.'

'Oh, so do I,' I replied, 'in the normal way. But I fear . . .'

'You fear what?'

'She's gone,' I said. 'Leaving this. . . .'

The aunt looked at the paper, then said: 'How curious.' She added: 'Of course, she has gone: that happened a year ago. She must have left several messages, I suppose. I remember that Etta found one in the mincing machine, saying to tell them to mince their gizzards. Etta seemed very much put out. That was *last* Christmas Eve, I remember — dear me, what a coincidence. . . . So you found this, did you?' she said, re-reading the paper with less repugnance than I should have wished to see. 'I expect, if you went on poking about the kitchen . . .'

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Annoyed, I said tartly: 'A reprehensible cook!'

'No worse than other English cooks,' she replied. 'They all declare they have never heard of a *pasta*, and that oil in cookery makes one repeat. But I always found her cheerful and kind. And of course I miss her — Etta's been cooking since.' (This was the elder Miss Rangerton-Karney.)

'But look,' I said, 'I was led to *this* dreadful message, by another one, on the table. *That* can't have been there a year.'

'I suppose not,' the aunt said, showing indifference. She picked up her book and inclined again to the lamp.

I said: 'You don't think some other servant . . .'

She looked at me like a fish.

'They *have* no other servants. Oh no: not since the cook . . .'

Her voice trailed away. 'Well, it's all very odd, I'm sure.'

'It's worse than odd, my dear lady: there won't be any dinner.'

She shocked me by emitting a kind of giggle. She said: 'Unless they *do* boil their heads.'

The idea that the Rangerton-Karneys might be out on a cook-hunt rationalized this perplexing evening for me. I am always more comfortable when I can tell myself that people are, after all, behaving accountably. The Rangerton-Karneys always acted in trio. The idea that one of them should stay at home to receive me while the other two went ploughing round the dark country would, at this crisis, never present itself. The Rangerton-Karneys' three sets of thoughts and feelings always appeared to join at the one root: one might say that they had a composite character. One thing, I could reflect, about misadventures is that they make for talk and often end in a laugh. I tried in vain to picture the Rangerton-Karneys laughing — for that was a thing I had never seen.

But if Etta is now resigned to doing the cooking . . . ? I thought better not to puzzle the thing out.

Screening my electric torch with my fingers past the uncurtained windows, I went upstairs to look for what might be my room. In my other hand I carried my little case — to tell the truth, I was anxious to change my socks. Embarking on a long passage, with doors ajar, I discreetly projected my torch into a number of rooms. All were cold; some were palpably slept in, others dismantled. I located the resting-places of Etta, Max and Paulina by the odour of tar soap, shoe-leather and boiled woollen underclothes that announced their presences in so many committee rooms. At an unintimate distance along the passage, the glint of my torch on Florentine bric-à-brac suggested the headquarters of the aunt. I did at last succeed, by elimination, in finding the spare room prepared for me. They had put me just across the way from their aunt. My torch and my touch revealed a made-up bed,

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draped in a glacial white starched quilt, two fringed towels straddling the water-jug, and virgin white mats to receive my brushes and comb. I successively bumped my knee (the knee still sore from the parcel) on two upright chairs. Yes, this must be the room for me. Oddly enough, it was much less cold than the others — but I did not think of that at the time. Having done what was necessary to the window, I lit up, to consider my new domain.

Somebody had been lying on my bed. When I rest during the day, I always remove the quilt, but whoever it was had neglected to do this. A deep trough, with a map of creases, appeared. The creases, however, did not extend far. Whoever it was had lain here in a contented stupor.

I worried — Etta might blame me. To distract my thoughts, I opened my little case and went to put my things on the dressing-table. The mirror was tilted upwards under the light, and something was written on it in soap: DEARIE, DON'T MIND ME. I at once went to the washstand, where the soap could be verified — it was a used cake, one corner blunted by writing. On my way back, I kicked over a black bottle, which, so placed on the floor as to be in easy reach from the bed, now gaily and noisily bowled away. It was empty — I had to admit that its contents, breathed out again, gave that decided character to my room.

The aunt was to be heard, pattering up the stairs. Was this belated hostessship on her part? She came into view of my door, carrying the night-light from the hall table. Giving me a modest, affronted look she said: 'I thought I'd tidy my hair.'

'The cook has been lying on my bed.'

'That would have been very possible, I'm afraid. She was often a little — if you know what I mean. But, she left last Christmas.'

'She's written something.'

'I don't see what one can do,' the aunt said, turning into her room. For my part, I dipped a towel into the jug and reluctantly tried to rub out the cook's message, but this only left a blur all over the glass. I applied to this the drier end of the towel. Oddly enough (perhaps) I felt fortified: this occult good feeling was, somehow, warming. The cook was supplying that touch of nature I had missed since crossing the Rangerton-Karneys' threshold. Thus, when I stepped back for another look at the mirror, I was barely surprised to find that a sprig of mistletoe had been twisted around the cord of the hanging electric light.

My disreputable pyschic pleasure was to be interrupted. Downstairs, in the caves of the house, the front door bell jangled, then jangled again. This was followed by an interlude with the knocker: an imperious rat-a-tat-tat. I called to the aunt: 'Ought one of us to go down? It might be a telegram.'

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'I don't think so — why?'

We heard the glass door of the porch (the door through which I had made my so different entry) being rattled open; we heard the hall traversed by footsteps with the weight of authority. In response to a mighty '*Anyone there?*' I defied the aunt's judgment and went hurrying down. Coming on a policeman outlined in the drawing-room door, my first thought was that this must be about the black-out. I edged in, silent, just behind the policeman: he looked about him suspiciously, then saw me. 'And who might you be?' he said. The bringing out of his notebook gave me stage fright during my first and other replies. I explained that the Rangerton-Karneys had asked me to come and stay.

'Oh, they did?' he said. 'Well, that is a laugh. Seen much of them?'

'Not so far.'

'Well, you won't.' I asked why: he ignored my question, asked for all my particulars, quizzed my identity card. 'I shall check up on all this,' he said heavily. 'So they asked you for Christmas, did they? And just *when*, may I ask, was this invitation issued?'

'Well, er — three days ago.'

This made me quite popular. He said: 'Much as I thought. Attempt to cover their tracks and divert suspicion. I daresay you blew off all round about them having asked you here?'

'I may have mentioned it to one or two friends.'

He looked pleased again and said: 'Just what they reckoned on. Not a soul was to guess they had planned to bolt. As for you — *you're* a cool hand, I must say. Just walked in, found the place empty and dossed down. Never once strike you there was anything fishy?'

'A good deal struck me,' I replied austerely. 'I took it, however, that my host and his sisters had been unexpectedly called out — perhaps to look for a cook.'

'Ah, cook,' he said. 'Now what brought that to your mind?'

'Her whereabouts seemed uncertain, if you know what I mean.'

Whereupon, he whipped over several leaves of his notebook. 'The last cook employed here,' he said, 'was in residence here four days, departing last Christmas Eve, December 24th, 194—. We have evidence that she stated locally that she was unable to tolerate certain goings-on. She specified interference in her department, undue advantage taken of the rationing system, mental cruelty to an elderly female refugee . . .'

I interposed: 'That would certainly be the aunt.'

'. . . and failure to observe Christmas in the appropriate manner. On this last point she expressed herself violently. She further adduced (though with less violence of feeling) that her three employers were "dirty spies, with

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their noses in everything." Subsequently, she withdrew this last remark; her words were, "I do not wish to make trouble, as I know how to make trouble in a way of my own." However, certain remarks she had let drop have been since followed up, and proved useful in our inquiries. Unhappily, we cannot check up on them, as the deceased met her end shortly after leaving this house.'

'The *deceased?*' I cried, with a sinking heart.

'Proceeding through the hall door and down the approach or avenue, in an almost total state of intoxication, she was heard singing "God rest you merry, gentlemen, let nothing you dismay." She also shouted: "Me for an English Christmas!" Accosting several pedestrians, she informed them that in her opinion times were not what they were. She spoke with emotion (being intoxicated) of turkey, mince pies, ham, plum pudding, etc. She was last seen hurrying in the direction of the canal, saying she must get brandy to make her sauce. She was last heard in the vicinity of the canal. The body was recovered from the canal on Boxing Day, December 26th, 194—.'

'But what,' I said, 'has happened to the Rangerton-Karneys?'

'Now, now!' said the policeman, shaking his finger sternly. 'You *may* hear as much as is good for you, one day — or you may not. Did you ever hear of the Safety of the Realm? I don't mind telling you one thing — you're lucky. You might have landed yourself in a nasty mess.'

'But, good heavens — the *Rangerton-Karneys!* They know everyone.'

'Ah!' he said, 'but it's that kind you have to watch.' Heavy with this reflection, his eyes travelled over the hearth-rug. He stooped with a creak and picked up the aunt's book. 'Foreign name,' he said, 'propaganda: sticks out a mile. Now, don't you cut off anywhere, while I am now proceeding to search the house.'

'Cut off?' I nearly said. 'What do you take me for?' Alone, I sat down in the aunt's chair and dropped a few more fir cones into the extinct fire.

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As you know, it's our policy to publish first stories just as often as possible. So far, in fact, we've had at least one in each of our issues, and we hope to continue this custom indefinitely. Not only do we want to encourage able beginners but we ourselves are vastly cheered by the fine quality of many of the "firsts" so modestly sent our way. C. A. Barnett's grim story is not only his first to be published, it is the first treatment we have yet seen of one aspect of life in the far future. With fine imagination, yet proper logic, Mr. Barnett depicts the voice of the Tempter as it might be in a brave, new world.

A Tale to Tell

by C. A. BARNETT

AGAIN *IT* was in her room when she escalatored to bed. She pressed the no-noise button so her mother wouldn't hear, and snuggled down beneath the covers, with her best dolly sitting against the pillow so she could hear, too. Every night for ever so long IT had come through the window to tell the story, always the same story, about the funny people. IT squatted on the floor because IT was so big and IT's eyes flashed orange whenever IT opened them.

"I have a tale to tell," IT said. IT always began that way, and the four-part story never changed. "The first part," IT droned.

He would stamp on the lawns shouting up at the dusty windows and he danced and ran along the tops of the walls but who bothered? No one paid attention so he hated them all but the green woman. She understood him but then she was his own mother and could be managed. He guessed they were pretty good to him anyway because they let him have her. They were going to throw her away when she stopped living but he cried because he had few things of his very own, and he cried so hard that they fixed her so she'd always keep, and they waxed her green.

She was always up there in his room, by his bed where he could see her when he went to sleep — smiling her crooked little smile where he had ripped out some of the stuffing in a spiteful moment. He guessed he would go dig her some flowers. He ran faster when he heard the Empress screaming up there behind the colored windows of her sitting room. Violet plants

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would be nice. They'd take root in her stuffing so she'd at least be useful. Always sitting there and never doing anything for him any more.

That was always the saddest part, and she sighed. "Go on, tell me the next part, about the Empress."

IT sighed, also. It was so necessary that she understand. She had never yet evinced more than pity for the boy in the first of these four un-morals.

"This one is about the Empress," IT went on.

Her voluptuous body oozed on and over the tiny chaise longue. Her pudgy, dimpled fingers, smothered with jeweled rings, darted nervously in and out of a lacy box of chocolate bonbons.

Greasy strands of dingy red hair straggled from beneath a cloth-of-gold kerchief bound about her head. This, in turn, was topped by a grimy coronet of cobweb-smeared pearls. She lolled impatiently, wriggling her grub-like fingers, coughing and hacking between outbursts of invective.

White flesh hung from her chin, bobbing into view, then sinking deep into the loose rollings of her swollen, gray breasts. The Empress was immense, but those two bloated puff-balls made her topheavy, as if they were poked out from within her by two gigantic fingers. Only a giant could suckle comfortably at this fount, if so indifferent a giant could be found.

In and out of her lap squirmed her poodle, Petite Bijou, the Empress Lydja's only loved one.

The Empress bit angrily at her cracked, filth-packed nails, spat parings onto the flowered rose-and-orchid carpet, struck out at Petit Bijou.

All the while she shrieked out orders, then countermanded them. Words of extreme filth buffeted the close, over-perfumed air of her boudoir. The smell of perspiration, drugs and musky perfumes lapped the frescoed ceiling and flowed through the door as all the while her servants and messengers and spies scurried in and out.

"Run, run, fetch me the witch's heart and see it's cooked in the fat of an owl. Serve it to me on a silver plate! Make haste before the novelty leaves my wish!"

They ran, and when they'd found the fattest sow they searched for a silver dish.

"Don't stop, don't stop," she cried.

IT wondered if she could be made to comprehend, when even the word "ugly" seemed to have no meaning in this shining world. She seemed eager enough to hear, but was she understanding?

IT thought, "I have been alone so long I must remember to speak as to

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an adult — children of this age are so advanced — fairy tales to them are but archaic legends, objectively interesting perhaps, but never so real as once they were, in the good 'bad old days'!"

IT sighed and stroked IT's horns reflectively. Malevolent hatred, distrust, inspired revenge seemed to have died out in this civilized age of Earth's people. Study, reflection, the arts, philosophy and courtesy had been carried to the farthest known star from Earth. There was no more need for planetary missionaries of good will. War, envy, spite — all forgotten, not needed in this placid existence. Evil was dead and IT had been left with no servants nor disciples nor playthings for tortured centuries.

IT should have foreseen the dwindling forces, should have thought to prepare for this extremely improbable lull in power. This wretched state came from giving subordinates too much rein — stupid imps that they were — while IT had stolen a nap.

Of course, IT would never have been able to enter consciousness without a living mortal confederate — unless souls began to stray once more — but this child's father was an historian compiling research on ancient demonology. While copying an ancient rite of conjuration he had worded it aloud correctly. And so, for the first time in the After-Wars Era, IT's door was opened. IT entered, but ignored the summoner as impossibly uninfluenceable. For days IT sulked beside the scholar's copyings, vainly scanning the universe for one mentality with a slight crack, a wedge. In the old times there had always been the very young or the mentally warped — but no "mentals" had occurred for a hundred years or more. Children had become unwarpable, earnest patterns of their parents' behavior, and unfortunately parents now were good examples. IT hopefully searched, despaired, and prepared to return to the lonely dark place to wait for the inevitable unrest to reappear.

The girl-child of the historian stole into that study where the rotting books lay and where IT fidgeted. She was curious, she read a bit.

"Why are you in here?" she asked.

IT started. She saw, but how? Of course, she had read the open pages, the conjuration. What rare luck! Perhaps this was the opening wedge.

IT coaxed gently, "Would you like to hear a story?"

"Of course, if it's a good one."

"I can't promise you that," IT said.

And so IT began the un-morals, but there were far too many re-tellings. Five nights of them and the child still simply stared and held her doll close.

"This, then, is the third part."

The velvet drapings stirred, parted, drawn aside by a slim, white hand, elegantly manicured and soft. The Baron Cecival entered, stood poised on

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tiptoe, two fingers pressed lightly against his chin. Quick points of light flashed along the heavy, gold chain about his neck, which supported an intricate and ancient pentagram outlined in rubies.

Cecival's tightly fitted trousers were cut from gold-and-gray velvet, as was his gold embroidered jacket. His hair was deepest black, worn long and curled; an ebony frame for his sallow, cynical features. His carmine lips creased tight in a slit of cruelness, his eyebrows were thin curved lines above his heavy-lidded eyes.

At last he glided forward, sliding through the clustered circles of the socially favored in the Emperor's Court. As he went, he granted a slow nod for this enemy or that acquaintance, but the cold, gray eyes showed neither recognition or acknowledgement. They curtsied and bowed before him and they hated him as he passed.

The Baron paused when he heard her coming. He raised to his eye the bit of glass he used to see through — he was quite blind without it — and he stood while all the others bowed and fell to the floor. It was the Illegitimate, the daughter of the Empress.

An icicle, she tinkled as she slid along, sewn from neck to feet in shimmering sapphires. Her long, pale neck shot upwards like a fountain above a mirror-pool. The Illegitimate looked into the Baron's eyes.

"Love is the intermediary of Birth and Death," he said.

"Yes," she said.

A look into her eyes was to see through a sheet of blue ice into a shallow, empty cave.

"You ask me to take your hand and walk with you?" he asked.

"Yes," she said.

The courtiers all bowed low and stepped aside to let the two go by. When they had gone the music was stopped and the lights were put out and everyone had to give back their beautiful clothes and return to their ugly homes.

The Baron walked until he tired and then he said, "We'll stop," and she said, "Yes." He told her many things and she agreed to all of them.

"We must kill Ivolette, she knows too much to go on living."

"Oh, yes," she said.

"You will see the Emperor," he said, "and speak at great length to him about the death of the witch, Ivolette."

"Yes."

"I'm not sleepy at all, and I want to hear the rest."

Her eyes had closed several times and IT was certain she had been asleep. IT must control IT's anger. Would she never find a meaning or ask a ques-

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tion? That last part was absolute decadence — was she made of wood? Could she be the one dolt existing?

Wearily IT repeated the last un-moral.

Everyone knew of Black Ivolette, the witch, a sorceress of the greatest power. No one saw her as she really was, unmasked, for always she wore disguise. Never did she leave her towers in the Dark Swamps behind the Castle unless she was masked or muffled in furs. None of the savages in the swamplands had ever seen her climb the steep paths to the Castle but once or twice she had been seen within. Some said she knew a secret way of caves and tunnels from the swamp into the Castle grounds, but no one knew for certain.

Everyone feared the witch. No one dared to ask what she did in the Castle. She knew everything.

There were many from the Castle who went to the witch at night and told her things and asked her for spells to rid themselves of the Emperor.

Many audienced with the Emperor, and told him things, and asked how best to kill the witch.

The witch would smile and listen and stir the bubbling pot of brew.

The Emperor would nod, and smile, and listen, and wave his royal fan.

They both learned many things as *two* that they never would have known as *one*. And the Emperor dearly loved a masquerade.

She might never have heard the tale at all for the lack of emotion she showed.

This chance was lost completely. How long, how long must the next wait be?

"Are you coming back again tomorrow night and will you tell me the story again?"

IT glared, unblinking and long. "No!"

IT left then, with a scrape of claws on the floor and window sill. The peculiar smell was not so strong.

"He left the window open again." She got down from bed and closed it. "I was getting just a little *bored* with that stinky old story every night," she said to her dolly.

"This is lots more fun." She spread a thoroughly-memorized, rotting book on the floor and lay the doll that looked just like her mother on it. "For being such a goody-good and stealing from me so much affection I should rightfully enjoy —"

She clenched her teeth together and carefully pushed another needle straight down into the real hair of her dolly.

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In her second story to be published in this magazine, Kay Rogers changes mood completely from the sad bitterness of Love Story *(F&SF, June 1951) and hilariously chronicles the encounter between a real, old-fashioned djinn and today's woman. Further, she points a moral for all denizens of the nether world: each therein had damn' well better stick to his own time and place. There's really nothing sadder than the spectacle of a demon going outside its own league!*

The Bitterness of Ghoril

by KAY ROGERS

WOMEN are the very servants of sin!

So it has been written and I, Ghoril, djinn of the love-amulet of Prithi-Devi, swear that is a true saying.

I came to this thrice-cursed United States, where all the men are dung-heads and their women are beasts without honor, through the vanity of an old man.

Eli Gorden he was called. He had prowled the world like a wind-devil throughout the days of his youth. Not till age had rimed his beard and stiffened his limbs did he bethink him of his home village.

And that thinking brought me, Ghoril, to this Village of the Elms and the woman Helen.

Blood kin to old Eli she was and in her I sensed at once that the ache of my hunger could be appeased. For the old man — may Yama make him howl — had held the amulet, and me, as a trinket only, with never a thought of purchasing my services.

This Helen Gorden sat at a table, turning over the chest of loot which old Eli had sent home, and as she touched the amulet, a mere bit of silver, set with balas rubies, I felt her unslaked desire.

What writes Rahman, "Where love enters, there is room besides for folly and nothing else"? That is another true saying and so I thought to beguile Helen Gorden. It is easy to trap a ruttish female. Her own lust is the chief weapon against her.

I appeared to her in the guise of a certain man whom I had once delivered to a bold vixen who sought my aid. He was a reckless fool of a horsethief,

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yet with her he learned to cringe — until she forgot our bargain and I exacted my fee. Ho! After my collecting, that thief was like one new-born from sheer relief!

In his shape — but in height less than half a cubit, for women seldom fear littlenesses save the rodents which they see every day — I moved upon the mirrored table.

We of the air know all languages and in Helen Gorden's own tongue, I reassured her before the first gasp had left her mouth.

"I am only a poor djinn," I whined. "I have answered your call, O Pearl. How may I serve you?"

She drew away, but only a little, saying, "A genie, you mean, don't you? Like in Aladdin."

And I saw the spark of interest in her eyes.

"Yes, O Voice of Music," I answered. In truth, she had a voice sweet as the waters cascading from the snows of Sheoran. "Did not your uncle write of me?"

"He sent a lot of stuff for the museum," she said. "It's to be a sort of memorial to him — poor old man! He hasn't been home for so long and when he wanted to come, it was too late. I wish . . ."

Hastily, I explained to her the powers of the love charm of Prithi-Devi and how I was bound thereto, for I was interested only in a bargain.

"There is a man you desire," I said. "By your need was I summoned, for I can bring his desire to you. Ho! I am only a poor djinn! Who am I to know why his desire is not as yours?"

Why indeed? For she was very fair with ivory skin framed in the silken dusk of her tresses and her eyes were blue as those forget-me-nots which the Persian girl wound in her hair to tempt the angel.

Helen Gorden read my thought.

"You wouldn't think I'd need a charm?"

And I said, "O Pearl, those eyes could make roast meat of any man's heart!"

While within me, my hunger leaped. I am old, even for such as I, and it had been wearylong since I fed.

This I concealed as Helen Gorden opened her heart.

"There is a man. We grew up together. He has never spoken of love to me, never! I've tried everything, glamor gal, the outdoor type — I even took a whirl at the intellectual life. But it's been no good. Though I know he's just blind because he's used to me. Only I can't walk up to him and say, 'Look, I'm the one! Can't you see?' But the trouble it would save!"

To myself, I sneered. Only behold the deceits she mentioned so lightly — surely, women are servants of sin!

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Then she said, "This is what I need. A sort of arrow pointing to me. As they do in the newspapers to show you a place you've always known but which has become news. Know what I mean? Something to make him sit up and take notice. Can you manage that?"

I straightened before her, saying: "O Vessel of Delights, I can make the blood of his liver cry to yours. Your voice shall echo in his ears as a longed-for song; your eyes shall hold his heaven. Is it enough?"

At this, she cried out. "Yes! Oh, yes!"

And I who had feared these Western women were a different breed than the doe-eyed supplicants of my own land was gratified and eager in my turn to complete our bargain.

"Put on the amulet," I urged.

She lifted it by its silver chain. Yet she hesitated. "Isn't there a price?"

"What!" I said loudly. "Shall there be talk of price between us? My heart shall fatten on the sight of your joy!"

She smiled and my heart sank. For it was a wise and evil smile.

"I've heard of your sort," she said. "There's always a price. Isn't there?"

"Yes," I snarled, for I am bound to answer that question. "If you take my aid, you must always wear the amulet."

"And?" she demanded, still with that evil smile.

"If you forget, I may claim your liver and your eyes."

"All I need from him is a new awareness of me," she pleaded. "Only that arrow I spoke of." And that was child's talk.

"I have but one bargain to make."

For the space of five breaths Helen Gordon stared past me.

"All right," she said. "But I shall make a condition. Our bargain holds only if I marry the man whose love you obtain for me. So you won't trick me with some kind of back-alley affair."

Ho! The woman who would invoke those who pleasure themselves without shame in the carvings of the archways at Prithi-Devi balks lest her lust be not fair in the eyes of the law! Ho indeed!

"It is enough," I said. "I swear by your condition. By Eblis, I swear."

And she swore by her own faith and donned the amulet.

I was well content. He who shall eat soon bears hunger well.

For women always forget the amulet; it is such a trifle. . . .

How was I to know this Western female thought of trickery as naturally as a Pathan — those true sons of our Father of Lies? But of that, later. . . .

Listen well now, sharer of my bitterness, and I will tell of the charm.

The woman had only to wear it, take the hand of her beloved and will his desire to her. The rest was in my hands through the power given me by those adored at Prithi-Devi.

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Of the man, Helen Gorden said that he was a great writer. In the bazaars, his tales sold better than all others. Hence, when he returned to his native place, great feastings were held in his honor, and as he was unwed, all virgins and others vied for his notice.

This she told me, with some little of hesitation, yet it was true I found as I watched the feastings.

And when at one of these, Helen Gorden, wearing my amulet, made occasion to take the man's hand, I made her desire unto her and lo! the great man followed her henceforth as the stallion the mare, the dog the bitch. And I resolved myself to wait with patience for the woman's forgetting.

It was but a matter of that. Women are incapable animals, especially in the flush of love. She would forget and I — would eat.

I knew when she wed though I did not enter the temple where the ceremony was performed. For there is much iron in these Western buildings.

And when she laid aside the amulet on the third day, I knew and swifter than a blooded horse, my hunger sped me through the air to her.

I found her beside a lake in a forest. Upon the water, her man cast for fish.

To Helen Gorden, I showed myself for the first time in my rightful stature, towering a full twelve cubits above her, in all the glory of my talons and the good tusks I have with which to eat.

"I am here," I greeted her.

"Big, aren't you?" she made answer and there was no fear in her.

That coolness angered me and swiftly I bent to exact payment of my debt.

But my talons could not close about her, even as if the amulet protected her. Yet it was plain she wore it not, for her shameless nakedness was hidden only by two narrow strips of cloth.

Then, in her voice like the tinkling falls of Sheoran, and smiling her smile of evil wisdom, Helen Gorden told me how I had been tricked.

And what could I do — I who have ever been a lion without a saint? In this, the greatest of my rages, I could do nothing but bend and twist the trees in the wind of my futile anger, so that the man hastened in alarm to Helen Gorden's side. As he drew near, I saw that it was indeed truth she spoke and it was bitter in my mouth, black bitter as the ache of my hunger, bitter as the triumph in Helen Gorden's smile.

Now, bowing to her uncle's wishes, she has given the charm — and me — to the museum and I languish in this austere place where none will ever come to bargain with me.

For Helen Gorden — may she die without sons — used the famed one's love, which I secured for her, as the kid is used to trap the tiger, even as bait to draw to her the man she loves, whom she secured by her own charms — the man she wed.

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Robert Graves probably knows as much about the nature of myth and reality as any living writer, as he has often proved in novels and non-fiction familiar to every enthusiast of imaginative literature. His few short stories are, undeservedly, much less widely known. The Shout, *a tale whose shimmering uncertainty recalls the best works of John Metcalfe, first appeared in a limited edition in London in 1929 as one of "The Woburn Books." It was written in 1926, when, as Mr. Graves tells us in* OCCUPATION: WRITER, *he "was still living on the neurasthenic verge of nightmare" — a state which, we warn you, he here communicates with uncomfortable vividness.*

The Shout

by ROBERT GRAVES

WHEN we arrived with our bags at the Asylum cricket ground, the chief medical officer, whom I had met at the house where I was staying, came up to shake hands. I told him that I was only scoring for the Lampton team today (I had broken a finger the week before, keeping wicket on a bumpy pitch). He said: 'Oh, then you'll have an interesting companion.'

'The other scoresman?' I asked.

'Crossley is the most intelligent man in the asylum,' answered the doctor, 'a wide reader, a first-class chess-player, and so on. He seems to have travelled all over the world. He's been sent here for delusions. His most serious delusion is that he's a murderer, and his story is that he killed two men and a woman at Sydney, Australia. The other delusion, which is more humorous, is that his soul is split in pieces — whatever that means. He edits our monthly magazine, he stage manages our Christmas theatricals, and he gave a most original conjuring performance the other day. You'll like him.'

He introduced me. Crossley, a big man of forty or fifty, had a queer, not unpleasant, face. But I felt a little uncomfortable, sitting next to him in the scoring box, his black-whiskered hands so close to mine. I had no fear of physical violence, only the sense of being in the presence of a man of unusual force, even perhaps, it somehow came to me, of occult powers.

It was hot in the scoring box in spite of the wide window. 'Thunderstorm

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weather,' said Crossley, who spoke in what country people call a 'college voice,' though I could not identify the college. 'Thunderstorm weather makes us patients behave even more irregularly than usual.'

I asked whether any patients were playing.

'Two of them, this first wicket partnership. The tall one, B. C. Brown, played for Hants three years ago, and the other is a good club player. Pat Slingsby usually turns out for us too — the Australian fast bowler, you know — but we are dropping him today. In weather like this he is apt to bowl at the batsman's head. He is not insane in the usual sense, merely magnificently ill-tempered. The doctors can do nothing with him. He wants shooting, really.' Crossley began talking about the doctor. 'A good-hearted fellow and, for a mental-hospital physician, technically well advanced. He actually studies morbid psychology and is fairly well-read, up to about the day before yesterday. I have a good deal of fun with him. He reads neither German nor French, so I keep a stage or two ahead in psychological fashions; he has to wait for the English translations. I invent significant dreams for him to interpret; I find he likes me to put in snakes and apple pies, so I usually do. He is convinced that my mental trouble is due to the good old "antipaternal fixation" — I wish it were as simple as that.'

Then Crossley asked me whether I could score and listen to a story at the same time. I said that I could. It was slow cricket.

'My story is true,' he said, 'every word of it. Or, when I say that my story is "true," I mean at least that I am telling it in a new way. It is always the same story, but I sometimes vary the climax and even recast the characters. Variation keeps it fresh and therefore true. If I were always to use the same formula, it would soon drag and become false. I am interested in keeping it alive, and it is a true story, every word of it. I know the people in it personally. They are Lampton people.'

We decided that I should keep score of the runs and extras and that he should keep the bowling analysis, and at the fall of every wicket we should copy from each other. This made story-telling possible.

Richard awoke one morning saying to Rachel: 'But what an unusual dream.'

'Tell me,' she said, 'and hurry, because I want to tell you mine.'

'I was having a conversation,' he said, 'with a person (or persons, because he changed his appearance so often) of great intelligence, and I can clearly remember the argument. Yet this is the first time I have ever been able to remember any argument that came to me in sleep. Usually my dreams are so different from waking that I can only describe them if I say: "It is as though I were living and thinking as a tree, or a bell, or middle C, or a

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five-pound note; as though I had never been human." Life there is sometimes rich for me and sometimes poor, but I repeat, in every case so different, that if I were to say: "I had a conversation," or "I was in love," or "I heard music," or "I was angry," it would be as far from the fact as if I tried to explain a problem of philosophy, as Rabelais's Panurge did to Thaumast, merely by grimacing with my eyes and lips.'

'It is much the same with me,' she said. 'I think that when I am asleep I become, perhaps, a stone with all the natural appetites and convictions of a stone. "Senseless as a stone" is a proverb, but there may be more sense in a stone, more sensibility, more sensitivity, more sentiment, more sensibleness, than in many men and women. And no less sensuality,' she added thoughtfully.

It was Sunday morning, so that they could lie in bed, their arms about each other, without troubling about the time; and they were childless, so breakfast could wait. He told her that in his dream he was walking in the sand hills with this person or persons, who said to him: 'These sand hills are a part neither of the sea before us nor of the grass links behind us, and are not related to the mountains beyond the links. They are of themselves. A man walking on the sand hills soon knows this by the tang in the air, and if he were to refrain from eating and drinking, from sleeping and speaking, from thinking and desiring, he could continue among them forever without change. There is no life and no death in the sand hills. Anything might happen in the sand hills.'

Rachel said that this was nonsense, and asked: 'But what was the argument? Hurry up!'

He said it was about the whereabouts of the soul, but that now she had put it out of his head by hurrying him. All that he remembered was that the man was first a Japanese, then an Italian, and finally a kangaroo.

In return she eagerly told her dream, gabbling over the words. 'I was walking in the sand hills; there were rabbits there, too; how does that tally with what he said of life and death? I saw the man and you walking arm in arm towards me, and I ran from you both and I noticed that he had a black silk handkerchief; he ran after me and my shoe buckle came off and I could not wait to pick it up. I left it lying, and he stooped and put it into his pocket.'

'How do you know that it was the same man?' he asked.

'Because,' she said, laughing, 'he had a black face and wore a blue coat like that picture of Captain Cook. And because it was in the sand hills.'

He said, kissing her neck: 'We not only live together and talk together and sleep together, but it seems we now even dream together.'

So they laughed.

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Then he got up and brought her breakfast.

At about half past eleven, she said: 'Go out now for a walk, my dear, and bring home something for me to think about: and be back in time for dinner at one o'clock.'

It was a hot morning in the middle of May, and he went out through the wood and struck the coast road, which after half a mile led into Lampton.

['Do you know Lampton well?' asked Crossley. 'No,' I said, 'I am only here for the holidays, staying with friends.']

He went a hundred yards along the coast road, but then turned off and went across the links: thinking of Rachel and watching the blue butterflies and looking at the heath roses and thyme, and thinking of her again, and how strange it was that they could be so near to each other; and then taking a pinch of gorse flower and smelling it, and considering the smell and thinking, 'If she should die, what would become of me?' and taking a slate from the low wall and skimming it across the pond and thinking, 'I am a clumsy fellow to be her husband'; and walking towards the sand hills, and then edging away again, perhaps half in fear of meeting the person of their dream, and at last making a half circle towards the old church beyond Lampton, at the foot of the mountain.

The morning service was over and the people were out by the cromlechs behind the church, walking in twos and threes, as the custom was, on the smooth turf. The squire was talking in a loud voice about King Charles, the Martyr: 'A great man, a very great man, but betrayed by those he loved best,' and the doctor was arguing about organ music with the rector. There was a group of children playing ball. 'Throw it here, Elsie. No, to me, Elsie, Elsie, Elsie.' Then the rector appeared and pocketed the ball and said that it was Sunday; they should have remembered. When he was gone they made faces after him.

Presently a stranger came up and asked permission to sit down beside Richard; they began to talk. The stranger had been to the church service and wished to discuss the sermon. The text had been the immortality of the soul: the last of a series of sermons that had begun at Easter. He said that he could not grant the preacher's premise that *the soul is continually resident in the body*. Why should this be so? What duty did the soul perform in the daily routine task of the body? The soul was neither the brain, nor the lungs, nor the stomach, nor the heart, nor the mind, nor the imagination. Surely it was a thing apart? Was it not indeed less likely to be resident in the body than outside the body? He had no proof one way or the other, but he would say: Birth and death are so odd a mystery that the principle of life may well lie outside the body which is the visible evidence of living. 'We cannot,' he said, 'even tell to a nicety what are the moments of birth

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and death. Why, in Japan, where I have travelled, they reckon a man to be already one year old when he is born; and lately in Italy a dead man — but come and walk on the sand hills and let me tell you my conclusions. I find it easier to talk when I am walking.'

Richard was frightened to hear this, and to see the man wipe his forehead with a black silk handkerchief. He stuttered out something. At this moment the children, who had crept up behind the cromlech, suddenly, at an agreed signal, shouted loud in the ears of the two men; and stood laughing. The stranger was startled into anger; he opened his mouth as if he were about to curse them, and bared his teeth to the gums. Three of the children screamed and ran off. But the one whom they called Elsie fell down in her fright and lay sobbing. The doctor, who was near, tried to comfort her. 'He has a face like a devil,' they heard the child say.

The stranger smiled good-naturedly. 'And a devil I was not so very long ago. That was in Northern Australia, where I lived with the black fellows for twenty years. "Devil" is the nearest English word for the position that they gave me in their tribe; and they also gave me an eighteenth-century British naval uniform to wear as my ceremonial dress. Come and walk with me in the sand hills and let me tell you the whole story. I have a passion for walking in the sand hills: that is why I came to this town. . . . My name is Charles.'

Richard said: 'Thank you, but I must hurry home to my dinner.'

'Nonsense,' said Charles, 'dinner can wait. Or, if you wish, I can come to dinner with you. By the way, I have had nothing to eat since Friday. I am without money.'

Richard felt uneasy. He was afraid of Charles, and did not wish to bring him home to dinner because of the dream and the sand hills and the handkerchief: yet on the other hand the man was intelligent and quiet and decently dressed and had eaten nothing since Friday; if Rachel knew that he had refused him a meal, she would renew her taunts. When Rachel was out of sorts, her favourite complaint was that he was overcareful about money; though when she was at peace with him, she owned that he was the most generous man she knew, and that she did not mean what she said; when she was angry with him again, out came the taunt of stinginess. 'Tenpence-halfpenny,' she would say, 'tenpence-halfpenny and threepence of that in stamps;' his ears would burn and he would want to hit her. So he said now: 'By all means, come along to dinner, but that little girl is still sobbing for fear of you. You ought to do something about it.'

Charles beckoned her to him and said a single soft word; it was an Australian magic word, he afterwards told Richard, meaning *Milk*: immediately Elsie was comforted and came to sit on Charles's knee and played

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with the buttons of his waistcoat for awhile until Charles sent her away.

'You have strange powers, Mr. Charles,' Richard said.

Charles answered: 'I am fond of children, but the shout startled me; I am pleased that I did not do what, for a moment, I was tempted to do.'

'What was that?' asked Richard.

'I might have shouted myself,' said Charles.

'Why,' said Richard, 'they would have liked that better. It would have been a great game for them. They probably expected it of you.'

'If I had shouted,' said Charles, 'my shout would have either killed them outright or sent them mad. Probably it would have killed them, for they were standing close.'

Richard smiled a little foolishly. He did not know whether or not he was expected to laugh, for Charles spoke so gravely and carefully. So he said: 'Indeed, what sort of shout would that be? Let me hear you shout.'

'It is not only children who would be hurt by my shout,' Charles said. 'Men can be sent raving mad by it; the strongest, even, would be flung to the ground. It is a magic shout that I learned from the chief devil of the Northern Territory. I took eighteen years to perfect it, and yet I have used it, in all, no more than five times.'

Richard was so confused in his mind with the dream and the handkerchief and the word spoken to Elsie that he did not know what to say, so he muttered: 'I'll give you fifty pounds now to clear the cromlechs with a shout.'

'I see that you do not believe me,' Charles said. 'Perhaps you have never before heard of the terror shout?'

Richard considered and said: 'Well, I have read of the hero shout which the ancient Irish warriors used, that would drive armies backwards; and did not Hector, the Trojan, have a terrible shout? And there were sudden shouts in the woods of Greece. They were ascribed to the god Pan and would infect men with a madness of ear; from this legend indeed the word "panic" has come into the English language. And I remember another shout in the *Mabinogion*, in the story of Lludd and Llevelys. It was a shriek that was heard on every May Eve and went through all hearts and so scared them that the men lost their hue and their strength, and the women their children, and the youths and maidens their senses. But it was caused by a dragon.'

'It must have been a British magician of the dragon clan,' said Charles. 'I belonged to the Kangaroos. Yes, that tallies. The effect is not exactly given, but near enough.'

They reached the house at one o'clock, and Rachel was at the door, the dinner ready. 'Rachel,' said Richard, 'here is Mr. Charles to dinner; Mr. Charles is a great traveller.'

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Rachel passed her hand over her eyes as if to dispel a cloud, but it may have been the sudden sunlight. Charles took her hand and kissed it, which surprised her. Rachel was graceful, small, with eyes unusually blue for the blackness of her hair, delicate in her movements, and with a voice rather low-pitched; she had a freakish sense of humour.

['You would like Rachel,' said Crossley; 'she visits me here sometimes.']

Of Charles it would be difficult to say one thing or another: he was of middle age, and tall; his hair grey; his face never still for a moment; his eyes large and bright, sometimes yellow, sometimes brown, sometimes grey; his voice changed its tone and accent with the subject; his hands were brown and hairy at the back, his nails well cared for. Of Richard it is enough to say that he was a musician, not a strong man but a lucky one. Luck was his strength.

After dinner Charles and Richard washed the dishes together, and Richard suddenly asked Charles if he would let him hear the shout: for he thought that he could not have peace of mind until he had heard it. So horrible a thing was, surely, worse to think about than to hear: for now he believed in the shout.

Charles stopped washing up, mop in hand. 'As you wish,' said he, 'but I have warned you what a shout it is. And if I shout it must be in a lonely place where nobody else can hear; and I shall not shout in the second degree, the degree which kills certainly, but in the first, which terrifies only, and when you want me to stop put your hands to your ears.'

'Agreed,' said Richard.

'I have never yet shouted to satisfy an idle curiosity,' said Charles, 'but only when in danger of my life from enemies, black or white, and once when I was alone in the desert without food or drink. Then I was forced to shout, for food.'

Richard thought: 'Well, at least I am a lucky man, and my luck will be good enough even for this.'

'I am not afraid,' he told Charles.

'We will walk out on the sand hills tomorrow early,' Charles said, 'when nobody is stirring; and I will shout. You say you are not afraid.'

But Richard was very much afraid, and what made his fear worse was that somehow he could not talk to Rachel and tell her of it: he knew that if he told her she would either forbid him to go or she would come with him. If she forbade him to go, the fear of the shout and the sense of cowardice would hang over him ever afterwards; but if she came with him, either the shout would be nothing and she would have a new taunt for his credulity and Charles would laugh with her, or, if it were something, she might well be driven mad. So he said nothing.

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Charles was invited to sleep at the cottage for the night, and they stayed up late talking.

Rachel told Richard when they were in bed that she liked Charles, and that he certainly was a man who had seen many things, though a fool and a big baby. Then Rachel talked a great deal of nonsense, for she had had two glasses of wine, which she seldom drank, and she said: 'Oh, my dearest, I forgot to tell you. When I put on my buckled shoes this morning while you were away I found a buckle missing. I must have noticed that it was lost before I went to sleep last night and yet not fixed the loss firmly in my mind, so that it came out as a discovery in my dream; but I have a feeling, in fact I am certain, that Mr. Charles has that buckle in his pocket; and I am sure that he is the man whom we met in our dream. But I don't care, not I.'

Richard grew more and more afraid, and he dared not tell of the black silk handkerchief, or of Charles's invitations to him to walk in the sand hills. And what was worse, Charles had used only a white handkerchief while he was in the house, so that he could not be sure whether he had seen it after all. Turning his head away, he said lamely: 'Well, Charles knows a lot of things. I am going for a walk with him early tomorrow if you don't mind; an early walk is what I need.'

'Oh, I'll come too,' she said.

Richard could not think how to refuse her; he knew that he had made a mistake in telling her of the walk. But he said: 'Charles will be very glad. At six o'clock then.'

At six o'clock he got up, but Rachel after the wine was too sleepy to come with them. She kissed him goodbye, and off he went with Charles.

Richard had had a bad night. In his dreams nothing was in human terms, but confused and fearful, and he had felt himself more distant from Rachel than he had ever felt since their marriage, and the fear of the shout was gnawing at him. He was also hungry and cold. There was a stiff wind blowing towards the sea from the mountains and a few splashes of rain. Charles spoke hardly a word, but chewed a stalk of grass and walked fast.

Richard felt giddy, and said to Charles: 'Wait a moment, I have a stitch in my side.' So they stopped, and Richard asked, gasping: 'What sort of shout is it? Is it loud, or shrill? How is it produced? How can it madden a man?'

Charles was silent, so Richard went on with a foolish smile: 'Sound, though, is a curious thing. I remember once, when I was at Cambridge, that a King's College man had his turn of reading the evening lesson. He had not spoken ten words before there was a groaning and ringing and creaking, and pieces of wood and dust fell from the roof; for his voice was exactly attuned to that of the building, so that he had to stop, else the roof might

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have fallen; as you can break a wine glass by playing its note on a violin.'

Charles consented to answer: 'My shout is not a matter of tone or vibration but something not to be explained. It is a shout of pure evil, and there is no fixed place for it on the scale. It may take any note. It is pure terror, and if it were not for a certain intention of mine, which I need not tell you, I would not shout for you.'

Richard had a great gift of fear, and this new account of the shout disturbed him more and more; he wished himself at home in bed, and Charles two continents away. But he was fascinated. They were crossing the links now and going through the bent grass that pricked through his stockings and soaked them.

Now they were on the bare sand hills. From the highest of them Charles looked about him; he could see the beach stretched out for two miles and more. There was no one in sight. Then Richard saw Charles take something out of his pocket and begin carelessly to juggle with it as he stood, tossing it from finger tip to finger tip and spinning it up with finger and thumb to catch it on the back of his hand. It was Rachel's buckle.

Richard's breath came in gasps, his heart beat violently and he nearly vomited. He was shivering with cold, and yet sweating. Soon they came to an open place among the sand hills near the sea. There was a raised bank with sea holly growing on it and a little sickly grass; stones were strewn all around, brought there, it seemed, by the sea years before. Though the place was behind the first rampart of sand hills, there was a gap in the line through which a high tide might have broken, and the winds that continually swept through the gap kept them uncovered of sand. Richard had his hands in his trouser pockets for warmth and was nervously twisting a soft piece of wax around his right forefinger — a candle end that was in his pocket from the night before when he had gone downstairs to lock the door.

'Are you ready?' asked Charles.

Richard nodded.

A gull dipped over the crest of the sand hills and rose again screaming when it saw them. 'Stand by the sea holly,' said Richard, with a dry mouth, 'and I'll be here among the stones, not too near. When I raise my hand, shout! When I put my fingers to my ears, stop at once.'

So Charles walked twenty steps towards the holly. Richard saw his broad back and the black silk handkerchief sticking from his pocket. He remembered the dream, and the shoe buckle and Elsie's fear. His resolution broke: he hurriedly pulled the piece of wax in two, and sealed his ears. Charles did not see him.

He turned, and Richard gave the signal with his hand.

Charles leaned forward oddly, his chin thrust out, his teeth bared, and

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never before had Richard seen such a look of fear on a man's face. He had not been prepared for that. Charles's face, that was usually soft and changing, uncertain as a cloud, now hardened to a rough stone mask, dead white at first, and then flushing outwards from the cheek bones red and redder, and at last as black as if he were about to choke. His mouth then slowly opened to the full, and Richard fell on his face, his hands to his ears, in a faint.

When he came to himself he was lying alone among the stones. He sat up, wondering numbly whether he had been there long. He felt very weak and sick, with a chill on his heart that was worse than the chill of his body. He could not think. He put his hand down to lift himself up and it rested on a stone, a larger one than most of the others. He picked it up and felt its surface, absently. His mind wandered. He began to think about shoemaking, a trade of which he had known nothing, but now every trick was familiar to him. 'I must be a shoemaker,' he said aloud.

Then he corrected himself: 'No, I am a musician. Am I going mad?' He threw the stone from him; it struck against another and bounced off.

He asked himself: 'Now why did I say that I was a shoemaker? It seemed a moment ago that I knew all there was to be known about shoemaking and now I know nothing at all about it. I must get home to Rachel. Why did I ever come out?'

Then he saw Charles on a sand hill a hundred yards away gazing out to sea. He remembered his fear and made sure that the wax was in his ears: he stumbled to his feet. He saw a flurry on the sand and there was a rabbit lying on its side, twitching in a convulsion. As Richard moved towards it, the flurry ended: the rabbit was dead. Richard crept behind a sand hill out of Charles's sight and then struck homeward, running awkwardly in the soft sand. He had not gone twenty paces before he came upon the gull. It was standing stupidly on the sand and did not rise at his approach, but fell over dead.

How Richard reached home he did not know, but there he was opening the back door and crawling upstairs on his hands and knees. He unsealed his ears.

Rachel was sitting up in bed, pale and trembling. 'Thank God you're back,' she said; 'I have had a nightmare, the worst of all my life. It was frightful. I was in my dream, in the deepest dream of all, like the one of which I told you. I was like a stone, and I was aware of you near me; you were you, quite plain, though I was a stone, and you were in great fear and I could do nothing to help you, and you were waiting for something and the terrible thing did not happen to you, but it happened to me. I can't tell you what it was, but it was as though all my nerves cried out in pain at once,

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and I was pierced through and through with a beam of some intense evil light and twisted inside out. I woke up and my heart was beating so fast that I had to gasp for breath. Do you think I had a heart attack and my heart missed a beat? They say it feels like that. Where have you been, dearest? Where is Mr. Charles?'

Richard sat on the bed and held her hand. 'I have had a bad experience too,' he said. 'I was out with Charles by the sea and as he went ahead to climb on the highest sand hill I felt very faint and fell down among a patch of stones, and when I came to myself I was in a desperate sweat of fear and had to hurry home. So I came back running alone.'

He did not tell her more. He asked, could he come back to bed and would she get breakfast? That was a thing she had not done all the years they were married.

'I am as ill as you,' said she. It was understood between them always that when Rachel was ill, Richard must be well.

'You are not,' said he, and fainted again.

She helped him to bed ungraciously and dressed herself and went slowly downstairs. A smell of coffee and bacon rose to meet her and there was Charles, who had lit the fire, putting two breakfasts on a tray. She was so relieved at not having to get breakfast and so confused by her experience that she thanked him and called him a darling, and he kissed her hand gravely and pressed it. He had made the breakfast exactly to her liking: the coffee was strong and the eggs fried on both sides.

Rachel fell in love with Charles. She had often fallen in love with men before and since her marriage, but it was her habit to tell Richard when this happened, as he agreed to tell her when it happened to him: so that the suffocation of passion was given a vent and there was no jealousy, for she used to say (and he had the liberty of saying): 'Yes, I am in *love* with so-and-so, but I only *love* you.'

That was as far as it had ever gone. But this was different. Somehow, she did not know why, she could not own to being in love with Charles: for she no longer loved Richard. She hated him for being ill, and said that he was lazy, and a sham. So about noon he got up, but went groaning around the bedroom until she sent him back to bed to groan.

Charles helped her with the housework, doing all the cooking, but he did not go up to see Richard, since he had not been asked to do so. Rachel was ashamed, and apologized to Charles for Richard's rudeness in running away from him. But Charles said mildly that he took it as no insult; he had felt queer himself that morning; it was as though something evil was astir in the air as they reached the sand hills. She told him that she too had had the same queer feeling.

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Later she found all Lampton talking of it. The doctor maintained that it was an earth tremor, but the country people said that it had been the Devil passing by. He had come to fetch the black soul of Solomon Jones, the gamekeeper, found dead that morning in his cottage by the sand hills.

When Richard could go downstairs and walk about a little without groaning, Rachel sent him to the cobbler's to get a new buckle for her shoe. She came with him to the bottom of the garden. The path ran beside a steep bank. Richard looked ill and groaned slightly as he walked, so Rachel, half in anger, half in fun, pushed him down the bank, where he fell sprawling among the nettles and old iron. Then she ran back into the house laughing loudly.

Richard sighed, tried to share the joke against himself with Rachel — but she had gone — heaved himself up, picked the shoes from among the nettles, and after awhile walked slowly up the bank, out of the gate, and down the lane in the unaccustomed glare of the sun.

When he reached the cobbler's he sat down heavily. The cobbler was glad to talk to him. 'You are looking bad,' said the cobbler.

Richard said: 'Yes, on Friday morning I had a bit of a turn; I am only now recovering from it.'

'God,' burst out the cobbler, 'if you had a bit of a turn, what did I not [illegible] It was as if someone handled me raw, without my skin. It was as if someone seized my very soul and juggled with it, as you might juggle with a stone, and hurled me away. I shall never forget last Friday morning.'

A strange notion came to Richard that it was the cobbler's soul which he had handled in the form of a stone. 'It may be,' he thought, 'that the souls of every man and woman and child in Lampton are lying there.' But he said nothing about this, asked for a buckle, and went home.

Rachel was ready with a kiss and a joke; he might have kept silent, for his silence always made Rachel ashamed. 'But,' he thought, 'why make her ashamed? From shame she goes to self-justification and picks a quarrel over something else and it's ten times worse. I'll be cheerful and accept the joke.'

He was unhappy. And Charles was established in the house: gentle-voiced, hard-working, and continually taking Richard's part against Rachel's scoffing. This was galling, because Rachel did not resent it.

['The next part of the story,' said Crossley, 'is the comic relief, an account of how Richard went again to the sand hills, to the heap of stones, and identified the souls of the doctor and rector — the doctor's because it was shaped like a whiskey bottle and the rector's because it was as black as original sin — and how he proved to himself that the notion was not fanciful. But I will skip that and come to the point where Rachel two days

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later suddenly became affectionate and loved Richard, she said, more than ever before.']

The reason was that Charles had gone away, nobody knows where, and had relaxed the buckle magic for the time, because he was confident that he could renew it on his return. So in a day or two Richard was well again and everything was as it had been, until one afternoon the door opened, and there stood Charles.

He entered without a word of greeting and hung his hat upon a peg. He sat down by the fire and asked: 'When is supper ready?'

Richard looked at Rachel, his eyebrows raised, but Rachel seemed fascinated by the man.

She answered: 'Eight o'clock,' in her low voice, and, stooping down, drew off Charles's muddy boots and found him a pair of Richard's slippers.

Charles said: 'Good. It is now seven o'clock. In another hour, supper. At ten o'clock, Rachel, you and I sleep together.'

Richard thought that Charles must have gone suddenly mad. But Rachel answered quietly: 'Why, of course, my dear.' Then she turned viciously to Richard. 'And you run away, little man!' she said, and slapped his cheek with all her strength.

Richard stood puzzled, nursing his cheek. Since he could not believe that Rachel and Charles had both gone mad together, he must be mad himself. At all events, Rachel knew her mind, and they had a secret compact that if either of them ever wished to break the marriage promise, the other should not stand in the way. They had made this compact because they wished to feel themselves bound by love rather than by ceremony. So he said as calmly as he could: 'Very well, Rachel. I shall leave you two together.'

Charles flung a boot at him, saying: 'If you put your nose inside the door between now and breakfast time, I'll shout the ears off your head.'

Richard went out this time not afraid, but cold inside and quite clear-headed. He went through the gate, down the lane, and across the links. It wanted three hours yet until sunset. He joked with the boys playing stump cricket on the school field. He skipped stones. He thought of Rachel and tears started to his eyes. Then he sang to comfort himself. 'Oh, I'm certainly mad,' he said, 'and what in the world has happened to my luck?'

At last he came to the stones. 'Now,' he said, 'I shall find my soul in this heap and I shall crack it into a hundred pieces with this hammer' — he had picked up the hammer in the coal shed as he came out.

Then he began looking for his soul. Now, one may recognize the soul of another man or woman, but one can never recognize one's own. Richard could not find his. But by chance he came upon Rachel's soul and recognized it (a slim green stone with glints of quartz in it) because she was estranged

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from him at the time. Against it lay another stone, an ugly misshapen flint of a mottled brown. He swore: 'I'll destroy this. It must be the soul of Charles.'

He kissed the soul of Rachel; it was like kissing her lips. Then he took the soul of Charles and poised his hammer. 'I'll knock you into fifty fragments!'

He paused. Richard had scruples. He knew that Rachel loved Charles better than himself, and he was bound to respect the compact. A third stone (his own, it must be) was lying the other side of Charles's stone; it was of smooth grey granite, about the size of a cricket ball. He said to himself: 'I will break my own soul in pieces and that will be the end of me.' The world grew black, his eyes ceased to focus, and he all but fainted. But he recovered himself, and with a great cry brought down the coal hammer crack, and crack again, on the grey stone.

It split in four pieces, exuding a smell like gunpowder: and when Richard found that he was still alive and whole, he began to laugh and laugh. Oh, he was mad, quite mad! He flung the hammer away, lay down exhausted, and fell asleep.

He awoke as the sun was just setting. He went home in confusion, thinking: 'This is a very bad dream and Rachel will help me out of it.'

When he came to the edge of the town he found a group of men talking excitedly under a lamppost. One said: 'About eight o'clock it happened, didn't it?' The other said: 'Yes.' A third said: 'Ay, mad as a hatter. "Touch me," he says, "and I'll shout. I'll shout you into a fit, the whole blasted police force of you. I'll shout you mad." And the inspector says: "Now, Crossley, put your hands up, we've got you cornered at last." "One last chance," says he. "Go and leave me or I'll shout you stiff and dead." '

Richard had stopped to listen. 'And what happened to Crossley then?' he said. 'And what did the woman say?'

' "For Christ's sake," she said to the inspector, "go away or he'll kill you." '

'And did he shout?'

'He didn't shout. He screwed up his face for a moment and drew in his breath. A'mighty, I've never seen such a ghastly looking face in my life. I had to take three or four brandies afterwards. And the inspector he drops the revolver and it goes off; but nobody hit. Then suddenly a change comes over this man Crossley. He claps his hands to his side and again to his heart, and his face goes smooth and dead again. Then he begins to laugh and dance and cut capers. And the woman stares and can't believe her eyes and the police lead him off. If he was mad before, he was just harmless dotty now; and they had no trouble with him. He's been taken off in the ambulance to the Royal West County Asylum.'

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So Richard went home to Rachel and told her everything and she told him everything, though there was not much to tell. She had not fallen in love with Charles, she said; she was only teasing Richard and she had never said anything or heard Charles say anything in the least like what he told her; it was part of his dream. She loved him always and only him, for all his faults. Charles and she had eaten a quiet supper, and she did think it had been bad of Richard to rush off without a word of explanation and stay away for three hours like that. Charles might have murdered her. He did start pulling her about a bit, in fun, wanting her to dance with him, and then the knock came on the door, and the inspector shouted: 'Walter Charles Crossley, in the name of the King, I arrest you for the murder of George Grant, Harry Grant, and Ada Coleman at Sydney, Australia.' Then Charles had gone absolutely mad. He had pulled out a shoe buckle and said to it: 'Hold her for me.' And then he had told the police to go away or he'd shout them dead. After that he made a dreadful face at them and went to pieces altogether. 'He was rather a nice man; I liked his face so much and feel so sorry for him.'

'Did you like that story?' asked Crossley.

'Yes,' said I, busy scoring, 'a Milesian tale of the best. Lucius Apuleius, I congratulate you.'

Crossley turned to me with a troubled face and hands clenched trembling. 'Every word of it is true,' he said. 'Crossley's soul was cracked in four pieces and I'm a madman. Oh, I don't blame Richard and Rachel. They are a pleasant, loving pair of fools and I've never wished them harm; they often visit me here. In any case, now that my soul lies broken in pieces, my powers are gone. Only one thing remains to me,' he said, 'and that is the shout.'

I had been so busy scoring and listening to the story at the same time that I had not noticed the immense bank of black cloud that swam up until it spread across the sun and darkened the whole sky. Warm drops of rain fell: a flash of lightning dazzled us and with it came a clap of thunder.

In a moment all was confusion. Down came a drenching rain, the cricketers dashed for cover, the lunatics began to scream, bellow, and fight. One tall young man, the same B. C. Brown who had once played for Hants, pulled all his clothes off and ran about stark naked. Outside the scoring box an old man with a beard began to pray to the thunder: 'Bah! Bah! Bah!'

Crossley's eyes twitched proudly. 'Yes,' said he, pointing to the sky, 'that's the sort of shout it is; that's the effect it has; but I can do better than that.' Then his face fell suddenly and became childishly unhappy and anxious. 'Oh dear God,' he said, 'he'll shout at me again, Crossley will. He'll freeze my marrow.'

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The rain was rattling on the tin roof so that I could hardly hear him. Another flash, another clap of thunder even louder than the first. 'But that's only the second degree,' he shouted in my ear; 'it's the first that kills.

'Oh,' he said. 'Don't you understand?' He smiled foolishly. 'I'm Richard now, and Crossley will kill me.'

The naked man was running about brandishing a cricket stump in either hand and screaming: an ugly sight. 'Bah! Bah! Bah!' prayed the old man.

'Nonsense,' said I, 'be a man; remember you're Crossley. You're a match for a dozen Richards. You played a game and lost, because Richard had the luck; but you still have the shout.'

I was feeling rather mad myself. Then the Asylum doctor rushed into the scoring box, his flannels streaming wet, still wearing pads and batting gloves, his glasses gone; he had heard our voices raised, and tore Crossley's hands from mine. 'To your dormitory at once, Crossley!' he ordered.

'I'll not go,' said Crossley, 'you miserable Snake and Apple Pie Man!'

The doctor seized him by his coat and tried to hustle him out.

Crossley flung him off, his eyes blazing with madness. 'Get out,' he said, 'and leave me alone here or I'll shout. Do you hear? I'll shout. I'll kill the whole damn lot of you. I'll shout the Asylum down. I'll wither the grass. I'll shout.' His face was distorted in terror. A red spot appeared on either cheek bone and spread over his face.

I put my fingers to my ears and ran out of the scoring box. I had run perhaps twenty yards, when an indescribable pang of fire spun me about and left me dazed and numbed. I escaped death somehow; I suppose that I am lucky, like the Richard of the story. But the lightning struck Crossley and the doctor dead.

Crossley's body was found rigid, the doctor's was crouched in a corner, his hands to his ears. Nobody could understand this because death had been instantaneous, and the doctor was not a man to stop his ears against thunder.

It makes a rather unsatisfactory end to the story to say that Rachel and Richard were the friends with whom I was staying — Crossley had described them most accurately — but that when I told them that a man called Charles Crossley had been struck at the same time as their friend the doctor, they seemed to take Crossley's death casually by comparison with his. Richard looked blank; Rachel said: 'Crossley? I think that was the man who called himself the Australian Illusionist and gave that wonderful conjuring show the other day. He had practically no apparatus but a black silk handkerchief. I liked his face so much. Oh, and Richard didn't like it at all.'

'No, I couldn't stand the way he looked at you all the time,' Richard said.

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The possible war against man by his machines is usually portrayed against a world-wide background, with the fate of humanity hinging on the outcome. This grim little tale plausibly argues that the uprising may well occur at your breakfast table when a mechanism develops unique destructive powers.

Machine

by JOHN W. JAKES

"HELEN, I want you to get rid of that Goddamned toaster!" Charlie shouted, nursing his hand and glaring at the shining silver box buzzing faintly beside the remains of breakfast.

His wife, looking fresh and pretty in her print robe, hurried into the kitchen, pouting a little as she said, "Charlie, I wish you wouldn't shout so. The neighbors will hear you. What's the trouble?"

Charlie sat down and fumbled for a cigarette. He pointed at the toaster and glowered, "I reached out to put another piece of bread in, and the thing jumped and burned my hand."

"Oh, Charlie," Helen cooed, like a mother reproving a naughty boy.

"I swear to God that's what happened," Charlie said earnestly, showing her his hand, with a small area of skin colored a bright pink.

Helen patted his arm. "Aunt Bertha gave us that toaster and it's very useful."

"I burned myself last week, too. I didn't tell you about that."

Helen sank down into a chair.

"I don't know what we're going to do, Charlie. Your notions about mechanical things are wearing me out." Her voice grew harsh, fingernail-on-blackboard. "Those fixations of yours are . . . well, just plain silly."

Charlie rubbed his pink hand. "OK, I don't feel like arguing. We'll decide tonight."

"But I go to the Women's Club tonight. Some very important man is lecturing on psychiatry . . ."

"Gimme a kiss, I gotta leave."

Petulantly, Helen kissed him. She couldn't help hugging him a little, too. She did love him.

He hurried out, smiling just a bit. She looked at his hand as it pulled the doorknob and shut the door. A flash of pink singed flesh . . .

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"He probably bumped against it," she smiled, "the big oaf . . ."

Buzzzz, said the toaster complacently.

Charlie took the streetcar to work. He always rode the trolley because you couldn't trust an automobile. That was part of it.

As the bell jangled and he settled into his seat, he thought about Helen, and couldn't see how she could be so blind about the toaster.

I know machines do have souls! he told himself as he had done so many times before. Helen and all the rest laugh, but none of them has ever seen a soul. How can they say a machine doesn't have one, if they don't know what to look for? And then they ignore the evidence that proves — *proves!* — that all mechanical things have souls, some good, some bad, just like men are good and bad. People don't pay any attention to the automobiles that run well for years, or the ones that break down and kill their drivers on the first thousand miles. Those wiring circuits that start fires. Or boilers that explode. Creation — man or machine — is soul! Then there was Rudy Bates, my roommate. Never got beyond his freshman year in college. Always laughing. His bright new automobile, smashed up on a bridge two days after he bought it. Rudy with a broken neck and no more laughter. If you look, you can tell the bad machines. Most people just don't look. The good ones won't hurt you. But the bad ones will . . . kill you. *I* watch, and *I* can see the creations of men go to pieces and kill. The machines with the bad souls . . .

Yeah, Charlie thought as the trolley rumbled, yeah, and that toaster is one of the bad ones. I've got to get rid of it before it does any more damage.

The conductor called his stop and Charlie got off. He could always depend on the trolleys. They were good machines. But the toaster . . .

Walking toward the office building, his mind focused:

Tonight, Helen had said. Tonight was her Women's Club meeting. He'd be home alone . . . to take care of the toaster . . . smash it . . .

He had to smash it, before it . . . He couldn't think about it.

Helen left at seven that evening, worried. Charlie had a strange expression on his face. She decided it might be a good thing to come home early from her meeting. Charlie looked tired and several times she caught him staring up at the shelf where the toaster gleamed. It was silly, of course, but she ought to keep an eye on him.

Charlie finished the dishes and pulled down the kitchen blinds.

Walking into the pantry, he took down the chrome-plated machine and set it on the kitchen table. It squatted there, calm, assured.

Charlie got a hammer from a drawer and walked back to the table.

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"Now we'll see who's boss," he growled. He slammed the hammer down on the toaster. But the toaster wasn't under it.

It gave a little jump and slid off onto the floor with a bang. It knew he was trying to kill it. Charlie started to sweat.

He mumbled something half groan, half snarl. Then he bent over and picked up the silver box. That was a mistake.

The lights in the room exploded, dimmed, whirled and exploded once more. Charlie felt sick and infinitely weak.

His hands were frozen to the cool metal of the machine . . . he couldn't let go . . . couldn't . . . couldn't . . .

Then he felt something intangible and yet horribly real . . . creeping . . . from the toaster . . . into his hands . . . creeping . . . taking over . . . making over . . . He didn't even have time to scream.

Helen opened the front door at nine-eighteen. It had been awfully hard to leave such a fascinating lecture. But the speaker's topic, all about people with odd delusions, kept reminding her of her husband.

"Darling?" she called from the living-room.

"Here," a voice said from the kitchen.

Helen didn't like the sound of that voice. She hurried.

Charlie was just going out the kitchen door. Helen saw him toss a mass of something flaccid and sticky into the garbage can. Although curiously lacking in frame and substance, it could have been the toaster.

Charlie carefully replaced the top of the garbage can and came back into the kitchen, watching Helen all the while. "I threw the toaster away," he said.

Helen started for the door. "We're going to bring that right back . . ."

She stopped, wincing. Charlie's hands were fastened on her arms like bands of metal. Charlie had never been very strong . . . and his eyes . . . they looked so strangely . . . bright . . .

"No," he said, and his voice was flat and brassy. "No."

For the first time in her life, Helen actually felt afraid of him. "All right," she murmured.

"Gimme a kiss," he said, smiling then, as if the smile were a repetition of many others, with no emotion in it. But Helen brushed her lips across his, the fear dying away. . . .

Then she stepped back a bit, cocked her head to one side and grinned.

"You look so funny, Charlie. That man who lectured tonight had a word . . . You look . . . unadjusted!"

Charlie shuffled his legs stiffly. "Not any more." He put his arm around her, and his voice held only the slightest shade of remote disinterest. "Not since we got rid of that toaster."

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Recommended Reading

by THE EDITORS

CHECKING back on our survey of 1950 science fiction publishing (F&SF April 1951), we find that there was plenty to complain about and that we did just that in not very pleasant terms. The principal gripes were, as you may remember, these: alarming lack of original novels, the resurrection in book form of ancient magazine trash better left buried, and the crudest sort of mis-labeling, such as presenting adventure-fantasy as "science fiction" or a crudely strung together batch of short stories as "a novel."

Fortunately for all concerned — writers, readers, publishers and reviewers — these practises have all but ceased; and this survey of 1951 publishing will be as mild and amiable as you please. Publishers last year issued 47 volumes which they labeled as science fiction. Of the 27 novels, there was only one case of calling a book "a novel" when it was in reality a faintly disguised series of short stories; last year there were 3. There also appeared 7 collections of an author's short stories, 10 anthologies, and 3 "two-in-one" volumes each containing two short novels.

Let's see how these originated. Of 30 books (counting the two-in-one jobs) there were 11½ novels whose book publication marked their first appearance before the public! 7 other novels were (as is normal in other fields) serialized shortly before or even simultaneously with their book publication. 8½ novels were revivals of works that first saw publication in magazines of the period 1939–1949; we're sure no one will quarrel with the permanent preservation of the best of that "Golden Age" of science fiction. Of the sludge printed before that era, confident publishers assembled 3 books and, presumably, found some market therefor.

Yes, publishers were far more enterprising in 1951. In 1950, the percentage of original books in the year's output was 25.9; in 1951 it was 42.6. Adding those which were serialized in contemporary magazines, the total percentage of *new* novels published in 1951 was the unprecedented figure of 68.5. No wonder we're so agreeable this year!

Yet there are annoyances. Where are the new writers in science fiction? While other types of fantasy gave us W. B. Ready (who seems to have caught the mantle of James Stephens), Kem Bennett, Carlo Beuf and a newcomer from other fields, Oscar Lewis, there hasn't been a single new writer of long straight hard-cover science fiction. In that analogous field of

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popular entertainment, mystery fiction, 35 first novels were published, often promptly followed by seconds. New writers accounted for 20% of 1951's output of crime-suspense novels! Let's face it: some day there aren't going to be any more Heinleins, Bradburys, van Vogts, et al.; it's up to publishers to groom the men (and women) who must take their places.

Now we come to that phase of science fiction which seems to have reached mass production proportions: the anthology. There had been 10 such published in 1951 when this piece went to the printers. And at that time there were at least *fifteen* in preparation for 1952! Excluding the Healy collection of originals, NEW TALES OF SPACE AND TIME, 9 anthologies reprinted 145 stories. Add to that the volumes of their own work by individual authors and you have a grand total of 214 magazine stories considered worthy of permanent preservation between hard covers. As readers, we doubt that there are that many; as editors we know darn well there aren't.

If this spate of anthologists agrees with us on hard-cover standards, it means that they will be taking in each other's washing; each new book will be (as some now are) a rehash of its predecessors. If they disagree, the law of diminishing returns guarantees that you, the purchaser, just won't be getting your money's worth.

Now we'll pass on from statistics to note a few recent books which are of some interest, if not quite of Best-of-1951 caliber. Perhaps the best of these is FOUNDATION by Isaac Asimov (Gnome), a group of his Foundation stories published as an "interplanetary novel" which is competent enough writing and thinking, if on the dull side. John Taine's period piece THE IRON STAR (FPCI) is, frankly, poorly written, but his concept of the star-metal that causes retrogression to apehood is curious and effective.

Some excellent reprints have appeared recently. The Modern Library has brought out THE SHORT STORIES OF SAKI (H. H. MUNRO); although not so labeled, the book is complete and a wonderful bargain at $1.25. Even better bargains are the following fantasies in the Rinehart Editions, a series of large and admirably edited paperbacks designed primarily (but by no means exclusively) for college students. These offer at 50¢ GULLIVER'S TRAVELS; and at 95¢ SELECTED SHORT STORIES OF HENRY JAMES (containing two of his ghostly tales), SELECTED TALES AND POEMS OF HERMAN MELVILLE, SELECTED TALES AND SKETCHES OF NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE, SELECTED PROSE AND POETRY OF EDGAR ALLEN POE, and Gerhart Hauptmann's fantasy play HANNELE. Leslie Charteris' THE SECOND SAINT OMNIBUS (Crime Club) includes the only two Saint stories that are fantasy — and fine specimens they are.

Now on to the alphabetical listing of 1951's top books of imaginative fiction (and occasionally fact):

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Kem Bennett: THE FABULOUS WINK (Pellegrini & Cudahy). American debut of a witty, literate and wise English author, with shrewd satire on empty formalism, whether religious or materialistic.

Carlo Beuf: THE INNOCENCE OF PASTOR MÜLLER (Duell, Sloan & Pearce). Another subtle satirico-allegorical import, and a pure delight in the off-trail Čapek tradition.

Everett F. Bleiler & T. E. Dikty, editors: THE BEST SCIENCE FICTION STORIES: 1951 (Fell). More uneven than previous annual collections, but still containing some of the year's brightest highlights.

Ray Bradbury: THE ILLUSTRATED MAN (Doubleday). Again uneven, but plentifully studded with Bradbury at his dazzling best.

John Dickson Carr: THE DEVIL IN VELVET (Harper). Unbelievably perfect fusion of time travel and diabolism with historical romance and pure detection.

Jean Charlot: DANCE OF DEATH (Sheed & Ward). Superlative macabre humor in a welcome modernization of a great ancient art-form.

Arthur C. Clarke: PRELUDE TO SPACE (Galaxy). Simple, explicit and poetic novelization of the preparations for space flight — which demands a hard-cover issue.

Jack Coggins & Fletcher Pratt: ROCKETS, JETS, GUIDED MISSILES AND SPACE SHIPS (Random). Beautifully clear and incredibly inexpensive guide to the elements of the science behind science fiction.

John Collier: FANCIES AND GOODNIGHTS (Doubleday). We'll go out on a limb: The largest number of truly great stories of the imagination ever contained in a volume by a single author.

Groff Conklin, editor: POSSIBLE WORLDS OF SCIENCE FICTION (Vanguard). One of the veteran anthologist's best jobs: 22 solidly sustained stories all new to hard covers.

L. Sprague de Camp: ROGUE QUEEN (Doubleday). Sex (and *not* sexiness!) among the stars makes the most intelligent, ingenious and attractive de Camp story in years.

Raymond J. Healy, editor: NEW TALES OF SPACE AND TIME (Holt). Ten stories never before published anywhere, and of such quality as to add up to the year's top anthology.

Gerald Heard: THE BLACK FOX (Harper). Literarily and spiritually, the outstanding supernatural novel of at least the past decade.

Robert A. Heinlein: BETWEEN PLANETS (Scribner's). Exciting story of re-

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bellion and freedom, nominally for boys, but more mature than most "adult" science fiction.

Robert A. Heinlein: THE GREEN HILLS OF EARTH (Shasta). Second volume of Heinlein's indispensable "Future History," largely devoted to his "slick" stories.

Robert A. Heinlein: THE PUPPET MASTERS (Doubleday). Vivid suspense plotting and superb background detail convert an old idea into The Master's most widely appealing book to date.

L. Ron Hubbard: TWO NOVELS (Gnome). One of the two has not worn well; but FEAR remains a nearly perfect novel of psychological terror.

Malcolm Jameson: BULLARD OF THE SPACE PATROL (World). Sterling lot of stories on the most successfully drawn series character in modern science fiction.

Walt Kelly: POGO (Simon & Schuster). Nothing comparable has happened in the history of the comic strip since Harriman's KRAZY KAT.

Oscar Lewis: THE LOST YEARS (Knopf). Sensitive and touching pastiche of *If*-history, studying the last years of an un-assassinated Lincoln.

Willy Ley: ROCKETS, MISSILES, AND SPACE TRAVEL (Viking). Completely rewritten expansion of the definitive masterpiece in its field.

Fletcher Pratt, editor: WORLD OF WONDER (Twayne). For the old hand, largely too familiar; for the novice, the ideal introduction to modern imaginative literature.

Vance Randolph: WE ALWAYS LIE TO STRANGERS (Columbia University). Noble scholarship and dry wit combined in a grand collection of folk tales.

W. B. Ready: THE GREAT DISCIPLE AND OTHER STORIES (Bruce). Unaffected and direct modern variants on great Irish legendary themes.

A. E. van Vogt: SLAN (Simon & Schuster). New revised edition of a recognized all-time classic on the *Homo superior* motif.

Charles Williams: THE PLACE OF THE LION (Pellegrini & Cudahy). Profoundly conceived and magnificently visualized novel of the relation of man to God.

Philip Wylie: THE DISAPPEARANCE (Rinehart). Exasperating in its philosophical pretensions, but flawless in its story-telling and logical extrapolation of a brilliant idea.

John Wyndham: THE DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS (Doubleday). Quietly better written than most science fiction, and all but unique in the sheer terror of its concept.

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That learned compendium of the world's knowledge, THE ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA, *while quite properly advising that F. Marion Crawford was a Sanskrit scholar, man of letters and world traveler, neglects completely to mention that he was a pre-eminent writer of fantasy short stories! This outrageous sin of omission seems to call for some "letters to the editor"; we hope some of you will oblige. The creator of* The Upper Berth *and* The Screaming Skull *had, still within the fantasy framework, another approach to his work. Those are classics of supernatural terror, tales of revenants to be avoided . . . if possible. Here is a less familiar excerpt from Crawford's* UNCANNY TALES (*London, T. F. Unwin: 1911*), *a tender account of the brief activity of a tiny ghost, short-lived, pathetic, but wholly lovable.*

The Doll's Ghost

by F. MARION CRAWFORD

IT WAS A TERRIBLE ACCIDENT, and for one moment the splendid machinery of Cranston House got out of gear and stood still. The butler emerged from the retirement in which he spent his elegant leisure, two grooms appeared simultaneously, there were actually housemaids on the grand staircase, and Mrs. Pringle herself stood upon the landing. Mrs. Pringle was the housekeeper. As for the head nurse, the under nurse, and the nursery maid, their feelings cannot be described.

The Lady Gwendolen Lancaster-Douglas-Scroop, youngest daughter of the ninth Duke of Cranston, and aged six years and three months, picked herself up quite alone, and sat down on the third step from the foot of the grand staircase in Cranston House.

"Oh!" ejaculated the butler, and he disappeared again.

"Ah!" responded the grooms as they also went away.

"It's only that doll," Mrs. Pringle was distinctly heard to say, in a tone of contempt. Then the three nurses gathered round Lady Gwendolen and hurried her out of Cranston House as fast as they could, lest it should be found out upstairs that they had allowed the Lady Gwendolen to tumble down the grand staircase with her doll in her arms. And as the doll was badly broken, the nursery-maid carried it, with the pieces, wrapped up in Lady

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Gwendolen's little cloak. It was not far to Hyde Park, and when they had reached a quiet place they took means to find out that Lady Gwendolen had no bruises.

Lady Gwendolen Douglas-Scroop sometimes yelled, but she never cried. It was because she had yelled that the nurse had allowed her to go downstairs alone with Nina, the doll, under one arm, while she steadied herself with her other hand on the balustrade, and trod upon the polished marble steps beyond the edge of the carpet. So she had fallen, and Nina had come to grief.

When the nurses were quite sure that she was not hurt, they unwrapped the doll and looked at her in her turn. She had been a very beautiful doll, very large, and fair, and healthy, with real yellow hair, and eyelids that would open and shut over very grown-up dark eyes. Moreover, when you moved her right arm up and down she said "Pa-pa," and when you moved the left she said "Ma-ma," very distinctly.

"I heard her say 'Pa' when she fell," said the under nurse, who heard everything. "But she ought to have said 'Pa-pa.' "

"That's because her arm went up when she hit the step," said the head nurse. "She'll say the other 'Pa' when I put it down again."

"Pa," said Nina, as her right arm was pushed down, and speaking through her broken face. It was cracked right across, from the upper corner of the forehead, with a hideous gash, through the nose and down to the little frilled collar of the pale green silk Mother Hubbard frock, and two little three-cornered pieces of porcelain had fallen out.

"It's a wonder she can speak at all, being all smashed," said the under nurse.

"You'll have to take her to Mr. Puckler," said her superior. "It's not far, and you'd better go at once." The under nurse wrapped Nina up again and departed.

Mr. Bernard Puckler and his little daughter lived in a little house in a little alley, which led out off a quiet little street not very far from Belgrave Square. He was the great doll doctor, and his extensive practice lay in the most aristocratic quarter. He mended dolls of all sizes and ages, boy dolls and girl dolls, baby dolls in long clothes, and grown-up dolls in fashionable gowns, talking dolls and dumb dolls, those that shut their eyes when they lay down, and those whose eyes had to be shut for them by means of a mysterious wire. His daughter Else was only just over twelve years old, but she was already very clever at mending dolls' clothes, and at doing their hair, which is harder than you might think, though the dolls sit quite still while it is being done.

Mr. Puckler had originally been a German, but he had dissolved his na-

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tionality in the ocean of London many years ago, like a great many foreigners. He still had one or two German friends, however, who came on Saturday evenings, and smoked with him and played picquet or "skat" with him for farthing points, and called him "Herr Doctor," which seemed to please Mr. Puckler very much.

He looked older than he was, for his beard was rather long and ragged, his hair was grizzled and thin, and he wore horn-rimmed spectacles. As for Else, she was a thin, pale child, very quiet and neat, with dark eyes and brown hair that was plaited down her back and tied with a bit of black ribbon. She mended the dolls' clothes and took the dolls back to their homes when they were quite strong again.

The house was a little one, but too big for the two people who lived in it. There was a small sitting-room on the street, and the workshop was at the back, and there were three rooms upstairs. But the father and daughter lived most of their time in the workshop, because they were generally at work, even in the evenings.

Mr. Puckler laid Nina on the table and looked at her a long time, till the tears began to fill his eyes behind the horn-rimmed spectacles. He was a very susceptible man, and he often fell in love with the dolls he mended, and found it hard to part with them when they had smiled at him for a few days. They were real little people to him, with characters and thoughts and feelings of their own, and he was very tender with them all. But some attracted him especially from the first, and when they were brought to him maimed and injured, their state seemed so pitiful to him that the tears came easily. You must remember that he had lived among dolls during a great part of his life, and understood them.

"How do you know that they feel nothing?" he went on to say to Else. "You must be gentle with them. It costs nothing to be kind to the little beings, and perhaps it makes a difference to them."

And Else understood him, because she was a child, and she knew that she was more to him than all the dolls.

He fell in love with Nina at first sight, perhaps because her beautiful brown glass eyes were something like Else's own, and he loved Else first and best, with all his heart. And, besides, it was a very sorrowful case. Nina had evidently not been long in the world, for her complexion was perfect, her hair was smooth where it should be smooth, and curly where it should be curly, and her silk clothes were perfectly new. But across her face was that frightful gash, like a saber cut, deep and shadowy within, but clean and sharp at the edges. When he tenderly pressed her head to close the gaping wound, the edges made a fine grating sound, that was painful to hear, and the lids of the dark eyes quivered as though Nina were suffering dreadfully.

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"Poor Nina!" he exclaimed sorrowfully. "But I shall not hurt you much, though you will take a long time to get strong."

He always asked the names of the broken dolls when they were brought to him, and sometimes the people knew what the children called them, and told him. He liked "Nina" for a name. Altogether and in every way she pleased him more than any doll he had seen for many years, and he felt drawn to her, and made up his mind to make her perfectly strong and sound, no matter how much labor it cost him.

Mr. Puckler worked patiently and Else watched him. She could do nothing for poor Nina, whose clothes needed no mending. The longer the doll doctor worked, the more fond he became of the yellow hair and the beautiful brown glass eyes. He sometimes forgot all the other dolls that were waiting to be mended, lying side by side on a shelf, and sat for an hour gazing at Nina's face, while he racked his ingenuity for some new invention by which to hide even the smallest trace of the terrible accident.

She was wonderfully mended. Even he was obliged to admit that; but the scar was still visible to his keen eyes, a very fine line right across the face, downwards from right to left. Yet all the conditions had been most favorable for a cure, since the cement had set quite hard at the first attempt and the weather had been fine and dry, which makes a great difference in a dolls' hospital.

At last he knew that he could do no more, and the under nurse had already come twice to see whether the job was finished.

"Nina is not quite strong yet," Mr. Puckler had answered each time, for he could not make up his mind to face the parting.

And now he sat before the square deal table at which he worked, and Nina lay before him for the last time with a big brown paper box beside her. It stood there like her coffin, waiting for her, he thought. He must put her into it, and lay tissue paper over her dear face, and then put on the lid, and at the thought of tying the string his sight was dim with tears again. He was never to look into the glassy depths of the beautiful brown eyes any more, nor to hear the little wooden voice say "Pa-pa" and "Ma-ma." It was a very painful moment.

In the vain hope of gaining time before the separation, he took up the little sticky bottles of cement and glue and gum and color, looking at each one in turn, and then at Nina's face. And all his small tools lay there, neatly arranged in a row, but he knew that he could not use them again for Nina. She was quite strong at last, and in a country where there should be no cruel children to hurt her she might live a hundred years, with only that almost imperceptible line across her face to tell of the fearful thing that had befallen her on the marble steps of Cranston House.

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Suddenly Mr. Puckler's heart was quite full, and he rose abruptly from his seat and turned away.

"Else," he said unsteadily, "you must do it for me. I cannot bear to see her go into the box."

So he went and stood at the window with his back turned, while Else did what he had not the heart to do.

"Is it done?" he asked, not turning round. "Then take her away, my dear. Put on your hat, and take her to Cranston House quickly, and when you are gone I will turn round."

Else was used to her father's queer ways with the dolls, and though she had never seen him so much moved by a parting, she was not much surprised.

"Come back quickly," he said, when he heard her hand on the latch. "It is growing late, and I should not send you at this hour. But I cannot bear to look forward to it any more."

When Else was gone, he left the window and sat down in his place before the table again, to wait for the child to come back. He touched the place where Nina had lain, very gently, and he recalled the softly tinted pink face, and the glass eyes, and the ringlets of yellow hair, till he could almost see them.

The evenings were long, for it was late in the spring. But it began to grow dark soon, and Mr. Puckler wondered why Else did not come back. She had been gone an hour and a half, and that was much longer than he had expected, for it was barely half a mile from Belgrave Square to Cranston House. He reflected that the child might have been kept waiting, but as the twilight deepened he grew anxious, and walked up and down in the grim workshop, no longer thinking of Nina, but of Else, his own living child, whom he loved.

An undefinable, disquieting sensation came upon him by fine degrees, a chilliness and a faint stirring of his thin hair, joined with a wish to be in any company rather than to be alone much longer. It was the beginning of fear.

He told himself in strong German-English that he was a foolish old man, and he began to feel about for the matches in the dusk. He knew just where they should be, for he always kept them in the same place, close to the little tin box that held bits of sealing-wax of various colors, for some kinds of mending. But somehow he could not find the matches in the gloom.

Something had happened to Else, he was sure, and as his fear increased, he felt as though it might be allayed if he could get a light and see what time it was. Then he called himself a foolish old man again, and the sound of his own voice startled him in the dark. He still could not find the matches.

The window was gray; he might see what time it was if he went close to it, and he could go and get matches out of the cupboard afterwards. He

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stood back from the table, to get out of the way of the chair, and began to cross the board floor.

Something was following him in the dark. There was a small pattering, as of tiny feet upon the boards. He stopped and listened, and the roots of his hair tingled. It was nothing, and he was a foolish old man. He made two steps more, and he was sure that he heard the little pattering again. He turned his back to the window, leaning against the sash so that the panes began to crack, and he faced the dark. Everything was quite still, and it smelt of paste and cement and wood-filings as usual.

"Is that you, Else?" he asked, and he was surprised by the fear in his voice.

There was no answer in the room, and he held up his watch and tried to make out what time it was by the gray dusk that was just not darkness. So far as he could see, it was within two or three minutes of ten o'clock. He had been a long time alone. He was shocked, and frightened for Else, out in London, so late, and he almost ran across the room to the door. As he fumbled for the latch, he distinctly heard the running of the little feet after him.

"Mice!" he exclaimed feebly, just as he got the door open.

He shut it quickly behind him, and felt as though some cold thing had settled on his back and were writhing upon him. The passage was quite dark, but he found his hat and was out in the alley in a moment, breathing more freely, and surprised to find how much light there still was in the open air. He could see the pavement clearly under his feet, and far off in the street to which the alley led he could hear the laughter and calls of children, playing some game out of doors. He wondered how he could have been so nervous, and for an instant he thought of going back into the house to wait quietly for Else. But instantly he felt that nervous fright of something stealing over him again. In any case it was better to walk up to Cranston House and ask the servants about the child. One of the women had perhaps taken a fancy to her, and was even now giving her tea and cake.

He walked quickly to Belgrave Square, and then up the broad streets, listening as he went, whenever there was no other sound, for the tiny footsteps. But he heard nothing, and was laughing at himself when he rang the servants' bell at the big house. Of course, the child must be there.

The person who opened the door was quite an inferior person, for it was a back door, but affected the manners of the front, and stared at Mr. Puckler superciliously under the strong light.

No little girl had been seen, and he knew "nothing about no dolls."

"She is my little girl," said Mr. Puckler tremulously, for all his anxiety was returning tenfold, "and I am afraid something has happened."

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The inferior person said rudely that "nothing could have happened to her in that house, because she had not been there, which was a jolly good reason why;" and Mr. Puckler was obliged to admit that the man ought to know, as it was his business to keep the door and let people in. He wished to be allowed to speak to the under nurse, who knew him; but the man was ruder than ever, and finally shut the door in his face.

When the doll doctor was alone in the street, he steadied himself by the railing, for he felt as though he were breaking in two, just as some dolls break, in the middle of the backbone.

Presently he knew that he must be doing something to find Else, and that gave him strength. He began to walk as quickly as he could through the streets, following every highway and byway which his little girl might have taken on her errand. He also asked several policemen in vain if they had seen her, and most of them answered him kindly, for they saw that he was a sober man and in his right senses, and some of them had little girls of their own.

It was one o'clock in the morning when he went up to his own door again, worn out and hopeless and broken-hearted. As he turned the key in the lock, his heart stood still, for he knew that he was awake and not dreaming, and that he really heard those tiny footsteps pattering to meet him inside the house.

But he was too unhappy to be much frightened any more, and his heart went on again with a dull regular pain, that found its way all through him with every pulse. So he went in, and hung up his hat in the dark, and found the matches in the cupboard and the candlestick in its place in the corner.

Mr. Puckler was so much overcome and so completely worn out that he sat down in his chair before the work-table and almost fainted, as his face dropped forward upon his folded hands. Beside him the solitary candle burned steadily with a low flame in the still warm air.

"Else! Else!" he moaned against his yellow knuckles. And that was all he could say, and it was no relief to him. On the contrary, the very sound of the name was a new and sharp pain that pierced his ears and his head and his very soul. For every time he repeated the name it meant that little Else was dead, somewhere out in the streets of London in the dark.

He was so terribly hurt that he did not even feel something pulling gently at the skirt of his old coat, so gently that it was like the nibbling of a tiny mouse. He might have thought that it was really a mouse if he had noticed it.

"Else! Else!" he groaned right against his hands.

Then a cool breath stirred his thin hair, and the low flame of the one candle dropped down almost to a mere spark, not flickering as though a

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draught were going to blow it out, but just dropping down as if it were tired out. Mr. Puckler felt his hands stiffening with fright under his face; and there was a faint rustling sound, like some small silk thing blown in a gentle breeze. He sat up straight, stark and scared, and a small wooden voice spoke in the stillness.

"Pa-pa," it said, with a break between the syllables.

Mr. Puckler stood up in a single jump, and his chair fell over backwards with a smashing noise upon the wooden floor. The candle had almost gone out.

It was Nina's doll voice, and he should have known it among the voices of a hundred other dolls. And yet there was something more in it, a little human ring, with a pitiful cry and a call for help, and the wail of a hurt child. Mr. Puckler stood up, stark and stiff, and tried to look round, but at first he could not, for he seemed to be frozen from head to foot.

Then he made a great effort, and he raised one hand to each of his temples, and pressed his own head round as he would have turned a doll's. The candle was burning so low that it might as well have been out altogether, for any light it gave, and the room seemed quite dark at first. Then he saw something. He would not have believed that he could be more frightened than he had been just before that. But he was, and his knees shook, for he saw the doll standing in the middle of the floor, shining with a faint and ghostly radiance, her beautiful glassy brown eyes fixed on his. And across her face the very thin line of the break he had mended with such care shone as though it were drawn in light with a fine point of white flame.

Yet there was something human in her face, like Else's own, as if only the doll saw him through them, and not Else. And there was enough Else to bring back all his pain and to make him forget his fear.

"Else, my little Else!" he cried aloud.

The small ghost moved, and its doll-arm slowly rose and fell with a stiff, mechanical motion.

"Pa-pa," it said.

It seemed this time that there was even more of Else's tone echoing somewhere between the wooden notes that reached his ears so distinctly, and yet so far away. Else was calling him, he was sure.

His face was perfectly white in the gloom, but his knees did not shake any more, and he felt that he was less frightened.

"Yes, child! But where? Where?" he asked. "Where are you, Else?"

"Pa-pa!"

The syllables died away in the quiet room. There was a low rustling of silk, the glassy brown eyes turned slowly away, and Mr. Puckler heard the pitter-patter of the small feet in the bronze kid slippers as the figure ran

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straight to the door. Then the candle burned high again, the room was full of light, and he was alone.

Mr. Puckler passed his hand over his eyes and looked about him. He could see everything quite clearly, and he felt that he must have been dreaming, though he was standing instead of sitting down, as he should have been if he had just waked up. The candle burned brightly now. There were the dolls to be mended, lying in a row with their toes up. The third one had lost her right shoe, and Else was making one. He knew that, and he was certainly not dreaming now. He had not been dreaming when he had come in from his fruitless search and had heard the doll's footsteps running to the door. He had not fallen asleep in his chair. How could he possibly have fallen asleep when his heart was breaking? He had been awake all the time.

He steadied himself, set the fallen chair upon its legs, and said to himself again very emphatically that he was a foolish old man. He ought to be out in the streets looking for his child, asking questions, and inquiring at the police stations, where all accidents were reported as soon as they were known, or at the hospitals.

"Pa-pa!"

The longing, wailing, pitiful little wooden cry rang from the passage, outside the door, and Mr. Puckler stood for an instant with white face, transfixed and rooted to the spot. A moment later his hand was on the latch. Then he was in the passage, with the light streaming from the open door behind him.

Quite at the other end he saw the little phantom shining clearly in the shadow, and the right hand seemed to beckon to him as the arm rose and fell once more. He knew all at once that it had not come to frighten him but to lead him, and when it disappeared, and he walked boldly towards the door, he knew that it was in the street outside, waiting for him. He forgot that he was tired and had eaten no supper, and had walked many miles, for a sudden hope ran through and through him, like a golden stream of life.

And sure enough, at the corner of the alley, and at the corner of the street, and out in Belgrave Square, he saw the small ghost flitting before him. Sometimes it was only a shadow, where there was other light, but then the glare of the lamps made a pale green sheen on its little Mother Hubbard frock of silk; and sometimes, where the streets were dark and silent, the whole figure shone out brightly, with its yellow curls and rosy neck. It seemed to trot along like a tiny child, and Mr. Puckler could almost hear the pattering of the bronze kid slippers on the pavement as it ran. But it went very fast, and he could only just keep up with it, tearing along with his hat on the back of his head and his thin hair blown by the night breeze, and his horn-rimmed spectacles firmly set upon his broad nose.

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On and on he went, and he had no idea where he was. He did not even care, for he knew certainly that he was going the right way.

Then at last, in a wide, quiet street, he was standing before a big, sober-looking door that had two lamps on each side of it, and a polished brass bell-handle, which he pulled.

And just inside, when the door was opened, in the bright light, there was the little shadow, and the pale green sheen of the little silk dress, and once more the small cry came to his ears, less pitiful, more longing.

"Pa-pa!"

The shadow turned suddenly bright, and out of the brightness the beautiful brown glass eyes were turned up happily to his, while the rosy mouth smiled so divinely that the phantom doll looked almost like a little angel.

"A little girl was brought in soon after ten o'clock," said the quiet voice of the hospital doorkeeper. "I think they thought she was only stunned. She was holding a big brown-paper box against her, and they could not get it out of her arms. She had a long plait of brown hair that hung down as they carried her."

"She is my little girl," said Mr. Puckler, but he hardly heard his own voice.

He leaned over Else's face in the gentle light of the children's ward, and when he had stood there a minute the beautiful brown eyes opened.

"Pa-pa!" cried Else. "I knew you would come!"

Then Mr. Puckler did not know what he did or said for a moment, and what he felt was worth all the fear and terror and despair that had almost killed him that night. But by and by Else was telling her story, and the nurse let her speak, for there were only two other children in the room, who were getting well and were sound asleep.

"They were big boys with bad faces," said Else, "and they tried to get Nina away from me, but I held on and fought as well as I could till one of them hit me with something, and I don't remember any more, for I tumbled down, and I suppose the boys ran away, and somebody found me there. But I'm afraid Nina is all smashed."

"Here is the box," said the nurse. "We could not take it out of her arms till she came to herself. Would you like to see if the doll is broken?"

And she undid the string cleverly, but Nina was all smashed to pieces. Only the gentle light of the children's ward made a pale green sheen in the folds of the little Mother Hubbard frock.

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It is quite obvious by now that the researches of Professor Cleanth Penn Ransom know no bounds. No field of human activity or knowledge is wholly safe from his investigations. Now, after combining vitamins with the modus operandi *of the lightning bug, he makes a spectacular invasion of the theatre. And in* HAMLET *no less! You'll quickly discover Ransom's self-assigned role. His patient ally, Professor MacTate, is the victim of triple-casting; with his usual academic aplomb he plays the parts of dramatic coach, prompter — and mental patient!*

The Actinic Actor

by H. NEARING, JR

"THE trouble with most *Hamlets*," said Professor Cleanth Penn Ransom, of the Mathematics Faculty, "is the Ghosts aren't scary enough."

Professor Archibald MacTate, of Philosophy, crossed his long legs. "I don't know," he said. "The Ghost has some pretty scary lines. Even when you read them to yourself —"

"That's just the point." Ransom leaned over the desk and aimed a finger at MacTate. "You read those lines, and you think, my God that's good, and then you go see *Hamlet* some place, and what happens? Somebody comes clomping out, just like any other actor, and murders all that stuff you heard in your head. And you know why? Because the visual suggestions you got in your head from reading the lines aren't there on the stage. The Ghost hasn't — materialized." He grinned at his play on the word, stuck out his little belly, and began to swing back and forth in his swivel chair.

"But isn't that traditional?" said MacTate. "If you overplay the Ghost, you steal scenes from Hamlet himself. When Edmund Kean —"

"Who?" Ransom stopped swinging.

"Kean. Edmund Kean. Greatest Hamlet of them all. Something over a century ago. When he played —"

"Now don't get off on ancient history, MacTate. If you're going back there, go all the way back to Shakespeare. What part did he play in *Hamlet?*" Ransom nodded. "That's right. You think he couldn't have played those other parts if he'd wanted to? Nonsense. He picked the Ghost because he *intended* it to steal scenes."

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"My dear Ransom —"

"Now look, MacTate. There's no use arguing about it, because my Ghost is going to be really scary. And Hamlet can go —"

"*Your* Ghost?"

"Sure. It's going to flash on and off like a lightning bug. I tried it out this morning, and if it doesn't make stage history —"

"Ransom." MacTate raised a finger. "I'm afraid I'm not keeping up with the conversation. Just what is this Ghost of yours?"

"Me." Ransom jabbed a thumb into his belly. "Who else? The Faculty play. You know. Annual benefit for indigent Shakespearean actors. This year we're giving *Hamlet*."

"And you're the Ghost?" MacTate's opinion of the casting director's judgment was clear.

"All right, MacTate. I can't act. All right. But wait till you see. The way I've got it fixed, the Ghost doesn't need to act."

"But, Ransom —"

"Look, MacTate. Does a thunderstorm need to act? Does a — tornado? Not at all. You wouldn't notice whether they were acting or not. They're — sublime."

"And you're going to put on a sublime — what did you say? Lightning bug?"

"Now you needn't be reactionary, MacTate." Ransom started to swing again. "It's a matter of multiplication. You blow a lightning bug up to man size and you've got something."

MacTate smiled. "How do you do it? Stick a flashlight in your mouth?"

"Don't be silly." Ransom stopped swinging. "How could I recite the lines with a flashlight in my mouth? Anyway" — he held his breath for a moment — "this is a real flash. Look." He pointed to the window. "Pull down the shade and I'll show you."

MacTate shrugged, went to the window and pulled the shade down. The room, while not dark, was fairly gloomy.

"Now watch." Ransom held his breath again for a moment. Then he began to intone in a macabre rumble: "I am thy father's spirit, Doom'd for a certain term to walk the night, And for the day confin'd to fast in — fires —"

MacTate started. On "fires" Ransom's face blazed with a greenish light that was concentrated at his eyes in two incandescent coals. It was a cold, hard fire that made his head look something like a huge, fantastically carved jewel. For two or three seconds the light blazed, then slowly faded. Ransom proceeded to rumble: "Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature Are — burnt — and purg'd away."

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On "burnt" he flashed again. This time MacTate noticed that the green blaze was heralded by a slight grunt. Ransom continued: "But that I am forbid To tell the secrets of my prison-house, I could a tale unfold whose lightest word Would — snarl — No. Would — harass — No. Would — Damn it, MacTate, I always get stuck there. Anyway, you've seen enough to get the idea. Pull up the shade."

MacTate pulled it up and looked at Ransom, whose face, while a little flushed, was its old self again. "Good heavens. How do you do that?"

Ransom laughed, a little vindictively. "Beginning to change your mind about my acting?" He reached into the top drawer of his desk and took out a brown bottle. "Not much to it, really, considering the effect you get. It's just vitamins. Vitamin B_2 mostly." He opened the bottle and took out a brown pill. "Made it myself. This vitamin B_2 — what do you call it? Riboflavin. Well, if you irradiate riboflavin with ultraviolet rays, it turns fluorescent and gives off a glow that looks practically the same as the stuff in a lightning bug's tail. Through a spectroscope, I mean. So I figured you ought to be able to make your eyes act like a lightning bug, because there's always a lot of riboflavin in the retina. It was just a matter of finding out how." Ransom looked down demurely at the pill in his hand.

"Well?" MacTate motioned him to go on.

Ransom frowned. "I'm not quite sure of the formula, but I've got the general approach down. You see, a lightning bug works this stuff in its tail — luciferin, they call it — with nerves, an enzyme called luciferase and tracheal capillaries — for oxygen. *You* know. So I took some acetylcholine — that's the stuff your nerves make to send electricity through the muscles you want to contract — and mixed it with a mixture of luciferase and riboflavin. And then I had two or three oxygen compounds sitting around in bottles that I was going to experiment with for the oxygen — the compounds, not the bottles. Anyway, I had them all sitting there beside the acetylcholinated riboflavin or whatever you want to call it, when the rat broke out and knocked them over. Awful mess. Some places they got all mixed together, and others —"

"Just a moment, old man. What was it that broke out?"

"A rat. White rat. It was over in the biochem lab. You know. I had all this stuff out on the table, and this rat broke out of its cage and knocked the bottles over."

"I see."

"Well, I caught the rat when he started to eat the riboflavin. I don't know. I guess they were using him for a vitamin-starvation test or something, because he went for it like filet mignon. He didn't eat much of it, of course, because I put him right back in his cage. I had enough left to make these."

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Ransom tossed the brown pill into the air and caught it. "But I don't know which of the oxygen compounds he knocked into the riboflavin, or how much."

MacTate looked at the pill. "How did you find out it worked?"

"Oh, I was there the next day when they fed him, and I remembered he liked riboflavin so I put some in his dish. He liked it so much, he ate too fast and got the hiccups, and I noticed every time he hiccuped his eyes lit up. So I tried it on some other rats and it worked. And then I tried it on myself. Now all I have to do" — he popped the pill into his mouth — "is learn my lines."

"Ransom. Who cast you as the Ghost?"

Before Ransom could answer, the door flew open and a little man flitted into the room. He had wide blue eyes that seemed to be perpetually astonished and a sensitive mouth. He perched on Ransom's desk, took off his hat and ran a hand nervously over his balding head. "Ransom, I'm going mad. Just mad. I've come to apologize about this morning, though it wasn't really my fault. I'm just going mad, that's all."

"Pull yourself together, FitzSparrow." Ransom nodded at MacTate. "You know MacTate? This is FitzSparrow, MacTate. Dramatics. He's directing us and playing Hamlet, too."

FitzSparrow bobbed his head at MacTate and turned back to Ransom. "I know I shouldn't have lit into you quite so hard at rehearsal, Ransom, but you really have to learn your lines. With the shadow of Murdbloom breathing down our necks — look, a mixed metaphor, I'm going mad —"

"Look, FitzSparrow," said Ransom. "Why don't you tell Murdbloom you think Bacon wrote *Hamlet* after all. We'll still have to learn our parts, I mean, but —"

"Caught between two fires, Ransom." FitzSparrow shook his head tragically. "What would my colleagues say over here? The only way out is to put on a perfect show."

"Murdbloom." MacTate pursed his lips. "Name sounds familiar."

"Murdbloom," said Ransom, "is the dramatic critic of the *Chronicle*. What's worse, he's head of the dramatics department — over there." He waved, with a just perceptible air of contempt, in the direction of the city's other university. "He thinks Bacon —"

"Yes, I gathered that." MacTate looked at FitzSparrow. "But does he really consider a faculty play important enough to review?"

"My dear fellow," said FitzSparrow. "We may make some use of amateur talent, but —"

"Wait, FitzSparrow." Ransom held up a soothing hand. "MacTate, if FitzSparrow recited 'Mary had a little lamb' at a Sunday school picnic,

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Murdbloom would write a review of it. A nasty review, like the ones they write about scholarly books. It's a — fixation with him. FitzSparrow is a sort of personification of anti-Baconianism."

"You're understating the case, Ransom." FitzSparrow looked at him. "But I'm glad you grasp the situation as well as you do, because you see why you have to learn your lines. I don't want to be offensive, but you know I only gave you the part because you nagged me to death for it. And it's too late now for a replacement. My God, Ransom, do you realize we put on our warm-up performance at the mental hospital two weeks from today? I'm going mad. Just mad."

"Don't you worry about me, FitzSparrow. I'll learn them all right."

"It isn't as if we had a lot of expensive props," said FitzSparrow. "We'll all look absolutely undistinguished. Absolutely. So the acting is everything. If we don't —"

"Ransom." MacTate raised his eyebrows. "Doesn't he know about your —"

"No, no, MacTate." Ransom made a warning face. "I haven't mentioned that yet. But —"

"*What* haven't you mentioned yet, Ransom?" FitzSparrow looked at him suspiciously.

"Oh." Ransom laughed fatuously. "Well, I was saving it for a surprise —"

FitzSparrow banged his fist on the desk. "Listen here, Ransom —"

"Now, FitzSparrow, don't get excited. It's nothing at all. It's simply that — MacTate is going to drill me in my lines. Aren't you, MacTate?"

"I am?" MacTate looked apprehensively at the brown bottle on the desk.

Ransom grabbed up the bottle and put it back in the drawer. "Of course. That's all there is to it, FitzSparrow. I was going to surprise you by knowing all my lines at the next rehearsal. But now I won't. Surprise you, I mean."

FitzSparrow glared at him, got off the desk and backed up to the door. "Just see that you do, Ransom. Don't, rather." Muttering "mad," he opened the door and went out.

Ransom turned to MacTate. "Well, let's get started."

"Started?" MacTate cocked an eyebrow.

"Sure." Ransom reached into the desk drawer and tossed a thick book over to him. "Turn to *Hamlet* and go to work. Didn't you hear me tell him you're coaching me?"

For the next week or so MacTate tried every educational device he could think of to fix the Ghost's lines in his colleague's memory. He even had Ransom read the lines into a dictaphone and listen to them with earphones while he slept. But nothing availed to get Ransom over his two psychological hurdles. He could never remember the word "harrow," and his confusion

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at that point blanked out the lines down to "List, Hamlet." Similarly, he would always say "arches of mine ears" instead of "porches," and knowing intuitively that he had it wrong, he was thrown off from there down to "Thus was I, sleeping."

"It's *harrow*, old boy," MacTate would say. " 'Harrow up thy soul.' Rimes with FitzSparrow. Can't you remember it that way?"

" 'Harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young —' Damn it, MacTate, 'harrow' sounds wrong to me by now. I keep trying to correct myself when I shouldn't."

"Well, try it a little slower. Here we are. 'I could a tale unfold . . .' "

For "porches of mine ears," MacTate had him imagine a surrealistic ear-shaped temple with a columned stoa in front of it. "Are you visualizing the porch in front of the ear, Ransom? Let's go. 'Upon my secure hour thy uncle stole, With juice of cursed hebenon in a vial, And in the —' " He formed his lips to make a *p*.

"MacTate. Do you know what's on top of those columns?"

"What, old boy?"

"Arches."

The Saturday before the scheduled opening, they were no further than when they had started, except that Ransom no longer said "arches" but just went mute, as at "harrow."

"Ransom," said FitzSparrow after the morning rehearsal. "It won't do. MacTate here takes almost as much of your part as you do." He motioned to MacTate, who had replaced FitzSparrow's wife as prompter in hope of giving Ransom enough confidence to get through his lines. "I hate to suggest this, but I wonder if you wouldn't like to be prompter and let him —"

"No!" Ransom's eyes were anguished. "Listen, FitzSparrow. I've got to play the Ghost. Wait till you see — Listen. MacTate —" He turned and clutched desperately at his colleague's arm.

FitzSparrow rubbed his forehead. "Ransom. My God, think what Murdbloom will do to us. Think what he'll do to *me*."

"FitzSparrow. Listen. I swear you won't regret letting me play the Ghost. Maybe I don't have a memory like an illiterate, but it's going to be all right. I swear by the memory of — MacTate, what was that actor's name? About a century ago?"

"Edmund Kean."

"I swear by the memory of Edmund Kean that this *Hamlet* will never be forgotten."

FitzSparrow looked at him. "Aren't you right." He threw up his hands. "Oh, well, what's a reputation more or less. Who hath it? He that died o' Wednesday." He laughed hollowly, stopped abruptly and ran a hand over

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his head. "Look at that, Ransom. You've got me in the wrong play." He muttered, "Mad. . . . But listen here. We have to think of something to make you remember those lines. For instance, did you see that movie of *Hamlet* they made several years ago?"

"Sure." Ransom's eyes gleamed. "Can you get the sound track of that? Listen, with that Ghost's voice and my —"

"Don't be ridiculous." FitzSparrow waved a contemptuous hand at him. "But I was thinking it might help you to hear your speeches in an acting context again. The movie's showing this afternoon somewhere uptown. So why don't we buy some popcorn and run up to see it?"

"Sure, FitzSparrow." Ransom's sigh was poignant with relief.

The *Arabian* motion picture theater, which destiny had placed at the heart of a fertile city's procreational concentration, was, for better or worse, an institution of some sociological importance. The proprietor, who had taken part in a high-school production of *She Stoops to Conquer* at an impressionable age, was prone to confuse the classics with edification, and in spite of an unhappy experience with a French film, persisted in interlarding the moral westerns and ambiguous musicals of his commodity with as much fine art as his manager would stand for. Hence the kiddies' matinee of *Hamlet*.

Horatio, his voice barely audible over a susurration of crumpled candy wrappers, wiggling posteriors, and querulous whispers, was already expounding the international affairs of Scandinavia when Ransom and his tutors entered the theater and sat down somewhere near the middle. In a silly mood Ransom had seized on FitzSparrow's remark and bought a bag of popcorn. Without taking his eyes off the screen he held the bag out to his companions, who ignored him. Shrugging, he dipped into the bag himself. He had not eaten popcorn since taking his nephew to the circus some years back, and was astonished at how good it tasted. He crunched merrily, the noise unnoticeable in the sibilant uproar that filled the theater. It was a large bag, but by the "dram of eale" speech it was two-thirds empty.

When Hamlet began to follow the Ghost, the noise in the theater diminished by several decibels. Ransom could hear himself chomping the popcorn.

FitzSparrow looked at him. "Ransom, for the love of God throw that away. Your hurdles are coming up."

Ransom crammed his mouth full of popcorn and chewed vigorously. By "harrow up thy soul" he had managed to swallow it, though it felt as if it had lodged about the middle of his esophagus instead of going down to his stomach. He swallowed again and threw the rest of the popcorn on the floor.

"Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder," said the Ghost on the screen.

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Ransom turned his attention back to the unnatural lump in his midriff and twisted his body a little. He was suddenly very thirsty.

". . . revenge." said the screen Hamlet.

"I find thee apt;" said the Ghost; "And duller shouldst thou be than the fat weed That rots —"

Ransom interrupted with a loud hiccup. He had opened his mouth to breathe more easily, and the convulsion of his organs resounded in the stuffy theater with an unctuous smack. FitzSparrow started and looked at him. MacTate turned his head.

"Hey, Curtis," said a voice behind them. "Did you see that guy when he hiccuped? He —"

"Nah. Shut up. Look at the picture."

Ransom clamped his jaws together tight and held his breath. He could feel the next hiccup coiling for its spring deep in his insides. When it smote his closed glottis, it broke through with a slurring nasal grunt.

"Look, Curtis. He did it again."

"Ah, shut up. Let him hiccup if he wants to."

"I don't mean the hiccup. He — sparkled sort of."

"So the guy's got a flashlight. Watch the picture."

Ransom snatched out his handkerchief, wadded it into his mouth and held his breath. "I will not hiccup," he said in his mind. "I am a mathematician, and I will not hiccup."

The next one was muffled by the handkerchief, but the luciferous riboflavin in Ransom's eyes illuminated his head in full glory.

"Hey, Curtis, here comes the manager."

"We ain't with him. Look at the picture like you didn't see him."

"Ransom, for God's sake —"

"All right. Who's got that flashlight?" FitzSparrow was interrupted by a low but venomous female voice from the aisle.

Ransom turned his head, hiccuped, and blazed directly at her.

"Oh my God, a comedian. Listen, you, these kids have paid to see the picture, not you. Now get out of here and quit stirring them up."

Ransom blazed again.

"Look here," said FitzSparrow. "Since when do you kick people out for getting the hiccups?"

"Listen, buddy, I'm not going to argue with you. It's that light he's got. If he's your friend, you better get him out of here before I bring the cops."

"Just a minute. I'm afraid you don't know who we are. We —"

"Buddy, I don't care if you're Cecil B. De Mille. You can't bring comedians into this theater. Now are you going to get him out of here, or do we have trouble?"

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"Old man," said MacTate. "We've heard both the difficult speeches. Perhaps we shouldn't stay for the rest of it. Might go stale."

Ransom pulled the handkerchief out of his mouth and stood up. "MacTate, that's the most sensible idea you ever had."

"But look here," said FitzSparrow, "I don't like to take this lying down."

"All right, FitzSparrow." Ransom grabbed his arm and pulled him up the aisle. "Let's go outside and talk it over with her, anyway."

The manager followed them out to the lobby, chiding unrelentingly. "Think you'd be old enough to know better. Coming to a respectable theater with novelty tricks."

"Oh, I wouldn't say it was such a respectable place," said FitzSparrow, turning around. "It's these little fifth-run fire-traps that don't know how to be courteous to —"

"Listen, you. Watch out whose theater you're insulting." In the light, the manager turned out to be a dumpy, hard-bitten woman with henna hair and a ferocious expression. She was so angry that she failed to notice the crowd milling around in the street outside, or the ax-bearing fireman who came into the lobby. "If you're trying to start something —" She gave FitzSparrow a belligerent push.

"Say, Merle," said the fireman. "The paint store's on fire. Thought I better tell you. I don't think it'll spread, but —"

An urchin who had been watching Merle vs. FitzSparrow from the inner door disappeared into the theater. A second later, three or four children raced through the lobby to the front door. Another burst of half a dozen followed close on their heels. One of them brushed against FitzSparrow, knocking him toward the manager.

"Jeez, Merle," said the fireman. "I didn't want to start no panic."

A third volley of children streaked through the lobby. This time several of them bumped into FitzSparrow. He was thrown heavily against the fireman, who lifted his ax to avoid mayhem. FitzSparrow grasped at the ax for support. Another charge of children struck him so violently that he knocked the fireman over and found himself clinging to an unsupported ax. Reeling through the stream of children, he slammed into something yielding and fell to his knees on top of it. There was a momentary pause in the flow of children. He raised the ax over his head to get it out of the way and looked down. He was kneeling on the abdomen of the writhing manager. At that moment there was a flash of light.

"Ransom," he said, struggling to his feet, "is this the time for —"

"It's not me," said Ransom. "Look." He pointed.

A figure holding a black box turned furtively and ran out to the street. Suddenly the significance of the disc on top of the black box struck Fitz-

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Sparrow, and he recognized the furtive character in retrospect. "Good God," he said. "Do you know who —" He was interrupted by a squeal of rage behind him. He wheeled and saw the manager, livid, on her hands and knees. He tried to help her up, but she struck out savagely and worked her mouth at him. Another wave of jabbering children drowned out her imprecations and swept FitzSparrow down to the front door. He caught sight of Ransom and MacTate and fought his way to them. They ran down to the next corner.

"There's a taxi," said Ransom. "Hey." He led the way to the cab, and they all tumbled in. "Keep going this way. Fast," he said to the driver. Suddenly he turned to MacTate. "My God. I lost my hiccups."

FitzSparrow groaned. "Forget about your hiccups, Ransom. We're in real trouble now. Do you know who that was that took the picture?"

"Don't tell me it was Murdbloom," said MacTate.

FitzSparrow groaned again. "It might as well be. He's a disciple of Murdbloom's. Was going to be a great actor, but he got married and had to go to work. At the *Chronicle*. Works hand-in-glove with Murdbloom. And he's got a picture of me kneeling on a woman's abdomen with an ax in my hand. Do you realize what that means?"

Ransom gasped. "The front page in Monday's *Chronicle*. And that woman will find out who you are."

FitzSparrow shook his head. "That woman is the least of our worries. Can you imagine how the Board of Trustees will take it?"

"My God, FitzSparrow, that's right. They'll have you up Monday morning."

"Me! Don't forget he probably got both of you in that picture, too. The least they'll do is suspend us from the faculty pending an investigation. And our *Hamlet* —"

"FitzSparrow. They couldn't." Ransom turned agonized eyes to him. "They've got to let us put on our play. They —"

"Ransom." FitzSparrow looked at him. "How long have you been at the University? Do I have to tell you how their minds work?"

"I'm afraid he's right, Ransom," said MacTate. He looked at FitzSparrow. "You don't suppose there's any way of getting to that cameraman before —"

"MacTate." Ransom jabbed a finger at him. "That's it. Wait." He thought for a moment, then turned to FitzSparrow. "FitzSparrow, what's this fellow's name? Could we find him down at the *Chronicle?*"

"Name's Hannigan. But if you're thinking of trying to bribe him —"

"You just leave everything to MacTate and me, FitzSparrow. We've got to go back to the University for something, and then we'll go down to

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the *Chronicle* and fix everything up. Can't take you along, because this Hannigan knows you. But don't worry."

"But he's incorruptible. When it comes to Murdbloom, anyway. He —"

"Look, FitzSparrow. I've got a scheme figured out. Let's stop worrying till we see if it works."

They dropped FitzSparrow at the Fine Arts Building and went on to Ransom's office.

"Old boy," said MacTate as Ransom opened his desk drawer. "What are you up to?"

"Oh, nothing much." Ransom took out the brown bottle, opened it, and turned it upside down into the palm of his hand. "Just saving three careers and the faculty play." There were three pills in his hand. He popped them all into his mouth.

"But see here. Are those all the pills you have?"

Ransom nodded. "I need all the intensity I can get for this scheme."

"But what about the play? Don't you have to —?"

"Oh, no." Ransom threw the empty bottle into the wastebasket. "I've been taking them for several weeks. By this time the flash must be a permanently acquired ability."

"But couldn't the fuel, or whatever, be expendable? Like coal?"

"MacTate, I tell you this is a permanently acquired ability. You know, like writing. You feel in your hand that you can write any time you want to. Don't you? Well, that's how I feel about flashing." Ransom laughed. "Anyway, the argument's a little academic now." He patted his stomach. "You just wait till you see me doing the Ghost on the stage. Meanwhile, we've got to go down and catch this Hannigan."

They went down to the *Chronicle*, found out where Hannigan's desk was, and waited. They waited and waited and waited.

"Ransom," said MacTate as it started to grow dark outside. "Aren't you getting hungry?"

Ransom clasped his belly and groaned. "Should we risk sneaking out for a sandwich? I haven't eaten anything since that popcorn early this afternoon. And the pills. I —"

"Just a moment." MacTate pointed. "Isn't that Hannigan coming this way now?"

Ransom looked. "And he has the camera with him. Thank God. Now don't forget, MacTate. Let me do the talking." He put on a pompous expression and stepped up to meet Hannigan. "Mr. Hannigan, I presume?"

Hannigan regarded him with beady eyes.

"I want a word with you, Mr. Hannigan." Ransom took him by the arm and pulled him out of MacTate's hearing. "It's about MacTate here. My

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patient. I'm Dr. Ransom, the psychiatrist. You've heard of me, of course."

Hannigan looked at him noncommittally.

"We went to a great deal of trouble to come down here, Hannigan, because the matter is urgent. My patient is suffering from acute narcissism. Worst case I've seen in all my years of practice." He looked over at MacTate, who was gazing innocently around the room. "You'd never think it to look at him, would you?" He moved to stand between Hannigan and MacTate and spoke in an emphatic whisper. "You'd never guess that frustration of his mania often drives him to practically homicidal fury."

Hannigan moved his head to look over Ransom's shoulder. "Then what's he doing loose?" His dark eyes were just a little apprehensive.

"Absolutely essential," said Ransom. "In these cases, incarceration may impede recovery for good. Besides —" he jabbed a thumb against his belly — "I know how to handle him." He turned his head and looked at MacTate thoughtfully. "Most of the time," he added. He turned back to Hannigan with lowered brows. "In fact, my treatment was working wonders with him until this afternoon. Now I'm concerned about both him and — you."

"Me!"

"Nothing to get excited about." Ransom managed to speak soothingly without losing his sinister pompousness. "You see, we went out to the *Arabian* this afternoon to see this movie of *Hamlet*. What I call my poetry cure. We establish a cathexis, through the poetical treatment of character, that distracts the narcissist's fixation on his own ego. You follow me?" He fixed his auditor with a glittering eye and wished he had thought of using a Viennese accent. Hannigan was beginning to look to him like the type Joyce had called "yung and easily freudened." "So we were there," he continued, "when you took the picture of —" he laughed sardonically at human folly — "the wrestling match."

"How did you know who I was?" said Hannigan.

"Oh." Ransom smiled. "Well — as a matter of fact, MacTate is an old classmate of yours. Studied dramatics under Professor — what's his name?"

"Murdbloom." An odd light came into Hannigan's eye. He began to look pleased. Suddenly he looked at MacTate and frowned slightly. "Funny. I don't remember him."

"Oh, no. You wouldn't. That's the strange thing about incipient narcissism. Often found in involuted personalities. But what an impression you made on him. Potentially a second — Edmund Kean. That's what he said you were."

Hannigan tried to look modest.

"So you see, he naturally recognized you at once, and he went practically into convulsions insisting we find you, because he thinks he's in the picture

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you took." Ransom paused to let this sink in. "You know how it is with narcissists. Can't stand to think there's a picture of themselves they don't possess."

Hannigan began to look a little indignant. "Well, good Lord, he doesn't expect me to give him the film, does he? He can't —"

"No, no." Ransom shook his head. "Just a clear print, that's all he wants."

"There'll be plenty of them Monday." Hannigan smiled evilly.

"But he insists on having one now." Ransom spread his hands and shrugged. "He's a great admirer of yours, of course, but after all he *is* crazy. And I thought you might feel — safer if you knew there was nothing you had that he wanted. You see what I mean." He cleared his throat. "As a matter of fact, I'm prepared to go even further and offer you a — sum of money for the print."

Hannigan began to look interested. "A sum of how much money?"

Ransom waved expansively. "You name it. I'll put it on his bill."

Hannigan looked at him. "Doc, I don't know whether you're a phony or not, but for a hundred bucks you can have an advance print to use for blackmail, for all I care."

Ransom tried not to look too eager. He rubbed his nose. "That's a little steep. But it's a deal. Oh, MacTate." He turned and crooked his finger. "The man's going to make a picture for us now."

"Wait a minute," said Hannigan. "How about the hundred bucks? Cash."

Ransom took out his wallet and looked into it. "Let me see your wallet, MacTate." MacTate handed it to him, and he looked into it, too. He held out two bills. "Twenty dollars cash and the rest by check, Hannigan."

Hannigan looked at them both disapprovingly. "All right." He grabbed the bills and led the way to the dark room. Inside, he turned on the red light, took the negative off the camera plate, and went over to the developing tank.

"You're sure that's the right picture?" said Ransom. He gave a little grunt.

"Of course I'm sure," said Hannigan nastily. "Say, what's the matter with you? Are you sure *he's* the patient?"

"Sure," said Ransom breathlessly. He gave another grunt.

"Well, you act a lot crazier than he does." Hannigan put the negative into a metal frame and turned to drop it into the developer.

Ransom went over to him. "All right, MacTate. Keep him off as long as you can." His eyes blazed with the green radiance. He snatched the negative out of Hannigan's hands and held it up to his face.

"What the hell are you doing?" Hannigan's voice shook with fury. He lunged out to seize Ransom's wrists, but Ransom turned away from him

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and pressed the negative against his nose. As the green light began to fade, he grunted again and renewed it.

Hannigan threw himself at Ransom's back and knocked him to the floor. He grasped Ransom's neck with both hands, but Ransom hunched his shoulders and continued to blaze away at the negative. Gripping the back of Hannigan's coat, MacTate threw his full weight backwards in a series of violent tugs. The first time, Hannigan could not be budged. The second time, he gave a little. The third time, he let go of Ransom's neck and crashed back on top of MacTate. He struggled to get up, but MacTate retained his grip on the coat. He scrambled about on the floor, got his legs under him, and lunged away from MacTate. There was a ripping sound, and a loud thud, and then Hannigan put his hands to his head and groaned.

MacTate looked at Ransom. The radiance had grown much feebler. Suddenly it waned noticeably and all but went out.

"Come on, Ransom. That's enough. He'll be on his feet again in a second."

Ransom got to his feet, opened the dark-room door, and straightened his tie. "Too bad we didn't know he'd be so easy to handle. We could have saved those pills."

"Who was easy to handle?" said MacTate, flexing his cramped fingers.

"All right. But I bet he winds up thinking a poltergeist hit him."

MacTate smiled. "No, old boy. Poltergeists aren't actinic."

They ran out of the *Chronicle* building and headed for the drugstore on the corner.

"Listen, MacTate. We better split up, in case he changes his mind about the poltergeist and gets the police after us. I'm going to call FitzSparrow and tell him what happened. You go on home. I'll see you Monday night at the hospital."

"But there's just one thing." MacTate looked closely at his colleague's eyes. "You're sure you can still flash? In the dark room, you know, the light suddenly seemed to — give out."

Ransom laughed. "MacTate. Will you stop worrying. It was just fatigue. I felt like stopping, and I did. Look." He clapped MacTate on the shoulder. "I won't flash any more till the show Monday. That's nearly two days. Will that make you feel better?" He went into the drugstore and disappeared into a phone booth.

MacTate could not feel reassured. While not aesthetically convinced that his colleague's lightning-bug Ghost was good Shakespeare, he was aware that some such device was necessary to compensate for Ransom's bad memory. All day Sunday, and at free moments Monday morning, he pondered such mysteries as the law of the conservation of energy, and Monday afternoon he went to the library to look up some books on acquired charac-

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teristics. At length, however, he gave it up and spent the rest of the afternoon rereading *A Coffin for Dimitrios*. After supper he went out to the mental hospital to take up his duties as prompter.

Every year within memory the faculty play had opened in the auditorium of the Rockview State Mental Hospital, because an audience of its milder cases, uncritical but not unpenetrating, had proved to be almost Platonically apt for warm-ups. MacTate was struck by the contrast between the happy composure of that part of the audience he could see through the curtain hole and the backstage frenzy of the sane. FitzSparrow fluttered ubiquitously about, shattering whatever calm there was. Ransom sat in a corner in his black cloak, muttering weirdly. He looked up as MacTate approached.

"MacTate. My God, I still can't say my lines right. Yesterday I hit them all right once, but then I started trying too hard to do it again. Let me say them over for you till curtain time." He launched into a breathless monotone delivery of his lines as if he were reading modern poetry.

"Briefletmebe," he said. "Sleepingwithinmyorchard, Mycustomalwaysintheafternoon —"

"Ransom. MacTate. Oh God, listen. Do you know who's out there?" FitzSparrow, his face made up to look hollow-eyed, dashed up to them.

"Who?" said Ransom. He grinned. "Not Merle of the *Arabian*?" Suddenly his jaw fell. He aimed a finger at FitzSparrow. "Not — Oh, no."

"But he is. I just saw him, sitting beside the attendants."

"Well, he's in the right place."

FitzSparrow clasped his head with both hands. "Ransom. How can you joke about a thing like this? I knew he hated me, but I didn't think he would go so far as to cover a warm-up." He groaned. "Well, let's get it over with." He went out on the stage. "All right. Curtain time. Clear the stage."

The play began well. Francisco was properly frozen, Horatio properly stuffy. Probably driven by some subconscious urge to keep Ransom off the stage as much as possible, FitzSparrow had staged the first scene so that Horatio and the soldiers beheld the silent Ghost at a distance, as they looked over a rampart, and everything flowed smoothly. In the council scene, Hamlet showed from the very first word just who the central character was. Everything went so well that by the time Polonius finished nagging his children, Ransom was sweating with a bad case of nerves.

"MacTate. Do you realize you haven't had to prompt anybody? And when you get to me —"

MacTate, bent over his flashlight and prompt-book in the wings, was only dimly aware of his colleague's buzzing.

"MacTate. Don't you think the stage is too bright for a good flash effect? I've got to see the electrician. Be back in a minute."

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Hamlet was explaining to Horatio the significance of Danish dipsomania. "The dram of eale Doth all the noble substance of a doubt To his own scandal."

The next line in MacTate's book said, "Enter Ghost." He looked around. "Ransom —"

Suddenly all the stage lights went out. MacTate could hear FitzSparrow gasp.

"What the hell?" whispered Horatio.

"Keep going," FitzSparrow whispered back. "What else can we do?"

"Okay," Horatio whispered skeptically. "Look, my lord, it comes!"

"Angels and ministers of grace defend us! Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damn'd, Bring with thee airs from heaven or blasts from hell . . ." FitzSparrow's voice was magnificent, and he gave the damn'd and hell a more dramatic meaning.

"MacTate." Ransom was in the wings again, whispering hoarsely. "That electrician. What a stubborn — All I did was push him a little bit, but he hit the ladder and knocked it into the fuses. I didn't —"

"Ransom, do you know you missed your cue?"

"Oh my God. Did I? Look. I'd better go out now and start flashing."

"No. That would make it worse. Wait till the next scene. When you start talking."

"It beckons you to go away with it," said Horatio, "As if it some impartment did desire To you alone."

"MacTate. My God. I'm so nervous I've forgotten the cue. Is it close?"

"Shh. I'll tell you."

"I say, away!" said FitzSparrow. "Go on, I'll follow thee." He stepped into the wings. "Ransom, if that was you fooling with the lights —"

"Just a moment, FitzSparrow," said MacTate. "We're practically at the next scene. Get ready, Ransom."

Ransom grunted.

"Something is rotten in the state of Denmark," said Marcellus.

"Heaven will direct it," said Horatio.

Ransom grunted again.

"Nay, let's follow him." Marcellus left the stage.

"Here we are, both of you," whispered MacTate. "You're on."

FitzSparrow stepped out into the darkness of the stage. "Where wilt thou lead me? Speak, I'll go no further."

Ransom followed him out, but stayed almost within touching distance of MacTate. He grunted again. "Mark me." MacTate could tell by his strained voice that he was trying to flash, but nothing happened. The stage remained pitch-black.

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"I will," said FitzSparrow.

"My hour is almost come," said Ransom, "when I to sulphurous and tormenting flames" — he grunted desperately — "must render up myself." His voice trembled with agony. "MacTate!" he whispered.

"Alas, poor ghost," said FitzSparrow, unconvincingly.

"Pity me not," said Ransom, "but lend thy serious hearing To what I — ah — I — (Well, anyway) I am thy father's spirit, Doom'd for a certain term to walk the night, And for the day confin'd to fast in — fires — fires — (MacTate!) — Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature Are — burnt — and purg'd away — (Now, why —?) — But that I am forbid To tell the secrets of my prison-house, I could a tale unfold whose lightest word Would — would —"

"Harrow, Ransom, harrow."

"It's no use, MacTate. I can't —"

"Harrow up thy soul," MacTate said out loud, trying to sound like Ransom, "freeze thy young blood, Make thy two eyes . . ." He read on to "ears of flesh and blood."

"All right, MacTate. I'm all right here," Ransom whispered. "List, O, list! . . . list." He spoke on, letter-perfect, grunting hopefully now and again, but with no visible effect. When he got to "porches of mine ears," he said "arches," but kept on going. Finally he came to "Adieu, adieu! Hamlet, remember me," sighed audibly and came out into the wings.

He took off his cloak and threw it on the floor. "MacTate, read the rest of my lines for me. It won't matter. Just a couple more words in this scene and five or six lines in the third act."

"What do you mean, Ransom? What are you going to do?"

Ransom looked at him. "Hide," he said.

The next morning, MacTate called Ransom's office. There was no answer. After his class he went to Ransom's office and tried the door. It was locked. He turned to go away, thought a moment, then turned back and tapped on the translucent glass pane. "Ransom. Open up. It's only MacTate."

From inside the office came the squeak of a swivel chair. The door was quietly unlocked and opened about an inch. Then it swung wide open.

"Get in quick, MacTate. I'm keeping this locked." Ransom shut the door, locked it, and sat down. He put his elbows on the desk and rested his jaw in his hands.

MacTate sat down and looked at him. "I imagine that vitamin thing was a sort of fuel after all."

Ransom blinked his eyes. "I imagine it was."

"Well, don't take it so hard as all that, old boy," said MacTate. "The play wasn't at all bad after — That is, even in your scene, for instance, the

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audience probably just took for granted that something had happened to the lights."

"Something did."

"Well, don't worry about it. I don't think FitzSparrow is permanently disaffected. He even seemed a little cheerful, just after the play was over. Besides, I never thought so much of that lightning bug idea, anyway. When you go on tonight —"

"Tonight! Listen, MacTate. Do you actually think anybody's ever going to get me on a stage again?"

"But —"

"Don't be silly. You take it from now on. You did last night."

There was a knock at the door.

"Shh. I'm not in. You hear?" Ransom all but held his breath.

The knock came again. "Ransom. Open up. I know you're in there." It was FitzSparrow's voice. Ransom closed his eyes.

FitzSparrow knocked harder. "Ransom. Let me in. I know you're there because I saw MacTate go into the building, and he hasn't come out."

MacTate smiled apologetically. "Why don't you let him in?" he whispered. "You'll have to sooner or later."

"All right." Ransom sighed wearily and went to the door. "Now understand me, FitzSparrow," he said as he opened it, "I'm not going to apologize."

"Apologize?" FitzSparrow's eyes were shining. "Whatever for? Haven't you seen this morning's *Chronicle?*"

Ransom's jaw fell. "What happened? Did they decide to keep Murdbloom at the asylum?"

FitzSparrow perched on the desk. "Let me read you the drama page." He took the newspaper out of his pocket and opened it. "Here. Listen to to this. 'The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, which is attributed by the vested interests of Stratford-on-Avon to the illiterate actor, William Shakespeare, has been so frequently performed that one approaches a new production of it expecting reinterpretation in the nuances rather than the fabric of the drama. Last night's performance at the Rockview State Mental Hospital was, therefore, a surprise, since, in spite of an undistinguished performance in the title role by Ellsworth FitzSparrow' — I got off easy — 'the staging of the ghost scene marked what may safely be called the first new departure since it was played by the actor to whom the vested interests of Stratford-on-Avon assign the authorship of the work.' "

FitzSparrow cleared his throat. " 'It has long been customary, in one school of the so-called Shakespearean dramaturgy, to omit the presence of Banquo's ghost in the third act of *Macbeth*, on the ground that its manifestation is the creation of the protagonist's overwrought imagination. On the

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other hand, by some dubious logic, the same school has always shown the ghost of Hamlet's father on the stage, possibly because it is a speaking part. With unerring insight, the planners of last night's performance dispensed with the, at best, puerile device of materializing the Ghost, without foregoing the cogent poetry of its lines. On Horatio's "Look, my lord, it comes," the stage was plunged into utter darkness, as if symbolizing a transition of the setting to the fear-darkened depths of the hero's mind, while the disembodied voices of his companions entered distortedly through the "porches of his ears." '"

FitzSparrow darted a glance at Ransom. "Now get this. 'The speeches of the Ghost itself, in the most felicitous rendering within the memory of this reviewer, were charged, perhaps overcharged, with ineluctable agony. The voice seemed to be straining against some indescribable frustration, and from time to time broke in obscure, tortured mutterings. In alluding to the pains of Purgatory it actually changed timbre for some six or seven lines. It is by no means habitual for this column to bestow indiscriminate accolades, but —' " He looked up and beamed at Ransom. "That enough?"

"Well, I'll —" Ransom looked at MacTate. "MacTate. We're in. Both of us. Maybe when this show's over we can do one of those horse routines —"

"Don't!" FitzSparrow raised an admonitory hand. "Don't even think about anything but this show. This Darkened-Stage *Hamlet*. I —"

The phone on Ransom's desk rang. He picked it up.

"Hello . . . Yes . . ." Suddenly a look suggestive of Kean's Hamlet spread over his face. "What! . . . But how do you know? . . . Oh my God. No. What can we do but wait? I'll look you up when it happens." He put the phone back and stared helplessly at MacTate and FitzSparrow.

"Ransom." FitzSparrow grabbed him by the arm. "Good Lord. Why are you looking like that? What's happened?"

"The rat." Ransom's voice was choked. "It's turned green. And I —"

"See here, old boy." MacTate looked worried. "Not the one that —"

Ransom nodded lugubriously. "Some sort of delayed reaction. It didn't —"

"Ransom." FitzSparrow shook his arm impatiently. "What are you talking about? What rat? What could a rat —"

"Wait." Ransom's dolefulness began to disappear. "What did you say?"

FitzSparrow frowned. "I said what could a rat do to make you —"

"No, no. The ghost, I mean. You said something about a ghost."

"I said you look as if you'd seen one. What's that got to do —"

"Listen." Ransom's eyes gleamed. "I have. Seen one, I mean. A new, improved, super — Listen, FitzSparrow. You're all wrong about that darkened stage business. We need light. Look. When I turn green . . ."

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Almost all the most stimulating letters we receive end with the request: ". . . and please don't waste space on a letter column." But for the small minority who occasionally request such a feature, we offer this special page, in which a bright new humorist of the University of California Pelican *imagines the letter column of* Fantastic Space Tales.

Letters to the Editor

LIKES STORY

Dear Ed: Boy, Vampires of the Lunar Asteroid Gulf *was some story. I liked it. I read it eleven times and enjoyed it. Although the last two or three times I began to get the idea that I'd read a similar story somewhere before. Print more by Prufrock. I like him. He writes like the great Edgar Rice Burroughs. By the way I have twenty-seven copies of* Tarzan and the City of Gold *which I will swap or trade for back issues of* Spicy Weird Stories. *Liked Carthoff's illos for* Vampires of the Martian Pits. *Except in the story Valkor is described as having three heads and in the picture he has two. Carthoff should watch stuff like that. I enjoyed that babe on the cover. That two piece Terra-Gravitronic suit was fine. What there was of it. Heh, heh.* (Heh, heh, yourself. Ed.)

Stanley J. Hoff
Apt. C, Devil's Island

READ MARCH ISSUE

Editor: Wow. Gosh. Gee. Yeah, man!

Sam

Editor's note: That was Poe's story, *Vampires of the Rue Morgue.* Yes, we will print more of Poe's stories just as soon as he writes them, although we haven't heard from him for quite some time now. Let us hear from you again, Sam. We enjoy your mature and intelligent comments.

TROUBLE WITH PEN NAMES

Dear Editor: How about a hint as to who some of your authors really are? Is F. Stan Metz really Metz F. Stan? Does William Van Williams write under the name of Williams van William and Sam van Sam? Also isn't Harry C. Nordenhoffer really Max Glutz? And by the way, aren't you really Arnold Silver who escaped from Ohio State Prison in 1922?

Mrs. Emily Harkins

Editor's note: None of your damn business.

PLEASED WITH MARCH ISSUE

Dear Ed: I don't suppose you'll print this because I never wrote a letter to a mag before, but anyway I felt I had to because I like Vampires of the Martian Woods. *I have been reading science fiction for forty-two years and have never been more pleased with a yarn. I would compare it favorably with A. Merritt's* Vampires of the Venusian Woods. *And those pics by Rogoff. That inky blotch in the left hand corner really looked like Asgor, the Mad Ruler of the Sunken City. By the way, I would like to know what a BEM is. My friends won't tell me. Is it a dirty word?*

General Arthur MacDouglas
U. S. Army, Retired

Editor's note: A BEM is a bugeyed-monster. The word was invented by Jules Verne in *Vampires Under the Sea.*

A COMPLAINT

Dear slob of an editor: What's the big idea? In Vampires of South Dakota *the hero doesn't get the girl in the last paragraph. You trying to ruin good science fiction? After paying fifteen cents for your lousy mag I expect good writin. I hope this ain't becomin a literary mag like* Amazing Gore Stories.

Max Sprool

Editor's note: Don't worry, Max. We don't like none of that smart writing anymore than you don't. Read *Vampires of the Terra Mines* in the next issue. Even the vampire gets a girl in that one.

— RON GOULART

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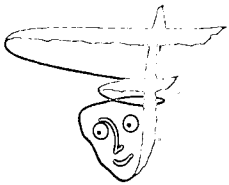

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